

THROUGH THE BIBLE STUDY

1 SAMUEL 4-7

Professional baseball players are notoriously superstitious... The story is told of the 1954 New York Giants. During a 16 game winning streak the team refused to wash their uniforms. For more than two weeks – the Giants wore dirty uniforms lest they wash off their good fortune.

Hall of fame player, Honus Wagner, believed every baseball bat held only 100 hits. After 100 hits he retired the bat – even if it was a perfectly good bat.

In 1993 when Ricky Henderson was traded to the Blue Jays he paid another player \$25,000 to give up jersey number 24, so he could wear his lucky number.

Former Colorado Rockies outfielder, Larry Walker, used to have a fixation with the number 3. He wore jersey number 33. He took 3 swings before stepping into the batter's box. In the locker room he showered from the third nozzle. He set his alarm for 3 minutes past the hour. He was married on November 3rd at 3:33pm.

After Giants' infielder, Jim Davenport, hit two home runs in one game, he noticed he'd missed a button on his shirt. For the rest of his career he left the same buttonhole empty. The way he buttoned his shirt became a superstition.

For some players good luck charms are as important as bats and gloves.

A coin, a chain, a rabbit's foot, a medal, a rock - are carried by the player in hopes of it conjuring up good luck. It seems

so silly to me, that you'd put your trust in a rabbit's foot. Especially, since it didn't bring much help to the rabbit.

Superstition though, explains what happened to Israel in 1 Samuel 4...

Chapter 4 **“And the word of Samuel came to all Israel. Now Israel went out to battle against the Philistines...”** For a time during the period of the Judges the Philistines dominated southern Israel. The Philistines were Europeans – who set sail from the island of Crete. The Philistines were called the *“Sea People”*.

The Philistines initially tried to invade Egypt, but were turned back - and ended up settling further north along the Mediterranean coast in southern Israel. They organized into five city-states – Gaza, Gath, Ekron, Ashkelon, and Ashdod.

Israel fought on equal terms with Ammon and Moab, but the Philistines had a military advantage. They imported iron weapons from Greece – armor, helmets, spears, swords, and shields. The Philistines were the first people in Canaan to possess iron. And the technology allowed the Philistines to dominate Israel.

Often, people mistake today's Palestinians as ancestors of the Philistines - but not so... the Palestinians are Arabs - the Philistines were Greeks.

The name *“Palestine”* was actually an invention of the Romans. When they conquered the Jews in the first century they renamed Israel after the Hebrews' ancient enemy, the Philistines. It was intended to be an insult to Israel.

I'm sure today's Palestinians have the same disdain for

Israel – and would like to dominate Israel – as did the Philistines... but there is no genetic relation.

One sidebar... Most ancient people viewed dogs as predators and unwanted wild animals. But a dog cemetery has been discovered in the Philistine city of Ashkelon. Evidently, they were one of the first cultures to domesticate dogs.

Israel “encamped beside Ebenezer; and the Philistines encamped in Aphek.”

Aphek was east of modern Tel Aviv – near Joppa. “Then the Philistines put themselves in battle array against Israel.” The Philistines were definitely the aggressors. Their army had pushed its way into Israeli territory.

“And when they joined battle, Israel was defeated by the Philistines, who killed about 4000 men of the army in the field.” This was a devastating defeat.

“And when the people had come into the camp, the elders of Israel said, “Why has the LORD defeated us today before the Philistines?”

Let us bring the ark of the covenant of the LORD from Shiloh to us, that when it comes among us it may save us from the hand of our enemies.”

The bloodied and beaten Israelites call for divine back-up - but rather than *cry out to the Lord*, they *bring out the Ark of the Lord*. Rather than trust in God they put their trust in the things of God. I call it “*a case of misplaced faith.*”

“So the people sent to Shiloh, that they might bring from

there the ark of the covenant of the LORD of hosts, who dwells between the cherubim. And the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were there with the ark of the covenant of God.”

At this particular time the Tabernacle was in Shiloh – and in its inner sanctum sat the Ark of the Covenant. The Ark was the centerpiece of the holy of holies.

The Ark was a rectangular box - roughly 4' long, by 2' high, by 2' deep. In the Ark were 3 items – the two tablets of the 10 Commandments, a jar of manna, and the rod of Aaron that budded with almond blossoms to confirm his priesthood.

The Ark was plaited with gold. Its lid - or *“the mercy seat”* as it was called - was made of solid gold – and adorned with two cherubim – or angels. The lid of the Ark served as God’s throne... and over it rested the visible, tangible presence of God.

Obviously, the Ark of the Covenant represented God to the people of Israel.

But the men of Israel made a fatal mistake. They assumed the Ark had powers of its own. Israel must’ve watched the Indiana Jones’ movie, *“Raiders of the Lost Ark”*, and saw the Ark burn the Nazi swastika off the side of a wooden container.

They confused the movies for the Bible. The Ark itself was nothing but a box.

Yet the superstitious Hebrews treated it like a four-leaf clover, or a rabbit’s foot, or number 33, or a dirty uniform. To the Israelis it was just a good luck charm.

And this mistake is not unique to the Hebrews of old. People today are often guilty of putting their trust in *the things of God* rather than in *God Himself*.

Faith often gets confused with superstition.

Superstition is the manipulation of inanimate objects in an attempt to direct the purposeless powers of chance. Whereas, faith is confidence in a living God who has a mind of His own, and orchestrates situations to accomplish His purposes.

Don't you be guilty of a misplaced faith!

Just carrying a Bible does you no good. You've got to read it. Making an appearance at church is only of value if you worship while you're there.

Christian relics, or music, or art might remind us of God's presence, but they should never take His place. Don't mistake the things of God for God Himself.

It's been said, "No one is so thoroughly superstitious as the godless man."

But tragically this is was Israel's error. Verse 5 "And when the ark of the covenant of the LORD came into the camp, all Israel shouted so loudly that the earth shook." The roar of the crowd sounded like a thunder clap.

"Now when the Philistines heard the noise of the shout, they said, "What does the sound of this great shout in the camp of the Hebrews mean?" Then they understood that the ark of the LORD had come into the camp.

So the Philistines were afraid, for they said, "God has come into the camp!"

Notice, the Philistines were also superstitious. They too mistook God for the things of God. But they were pagans. You expect it out of the Philistines – but the Israelis had acted no differently. They should've known better.

“And they said, "Woe to us! For such a thing has never happened before. Woe to us! Who will deliver us from the hand of these mighty gods? These are the gods who struck the Egyptians with all the plagues in the wilderness.”

The Philistines feared the God of Israel. At the exodus God made a name for Himself among the nations. Egypt's neighbors had sat up and taken notice.

The Philistines encourage each other in verse 9, “Be strong and conduct yourselves like men, you Philistines, that you do not become servants of the Hebrews, as they have been to you. Conduct yourselves like men, and fight!”

Verse 10 reveals what happens to God's people when they have a misplaced faith. “So the Philistines fought, and Israel was defeated, and every man fled to his tent. There was a very great slaughter, and there fell of Israel 30,000 foot soldiers.”

And I'm sure the Hebrews didn't think it could get any worse - *but it did!* “Also the ark of God was captured; and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, died.”

In the late 70s Israeli archeologists were digging in a grain silo at Izbet Sarteh when they found a pottery shard on which were inscribed five lines. The writing recounts this story... It provides amazing evidence for the Bible's historicity.

“Then a man of Benjamin ran from the battle line the same day, and came to Shiloh with his clothes torn and dirt on his head.” These were signs of mourning...

“Now when he came, there was Eli (the High Priest - Samuel’s mentor), sitting on a seat by the wayside watching, for his heart trembled for the ark of God. And when the man came into the city and told it, all the city cried out.” News of the defeat reaches Shiloh. The crowd that had shouted... now shutters...

When Eli heard the noise of the outcry, he said, "What does the sound of this tumult mean?" And the man came quickly and told Eli." It was a death blow.

Eli was 98 years old, and his eyes were so dim that he could not see.

Then the man said to Eli, "I am he who came from the battle. And I fled today from the battle line." And he said, "What happened, my son?"

So the messenger answered and said, "Israel has fled before the Philistines, and there has been a great slaughter among the people. Also your two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, are dead; and the ark of God has been captured."

It wasn't the news about his evil sons they upset him. He knew they'd gotten what they deserved. It was the Ark...

“Then it happened, when he made mention of the ark of God, that Eli fell off the seat backward by the side of the gate; and his neck was broken and he died, for the man was old and heavy.” The priest had grown so plump the weight of his body snapped his neck. He died instantly.

Eli's obituary appears in verse 18, "And he had judged Israel 40 years."

But Eli was not the only person shaken by the news of the Ark's capture.

"Now his daughter-in-law, Phinehas' wife, was with child, due to be delivered; and when she heard the news that the ark of God was captured, and that her father-in-law and her husband were dead, she bowed herself and gave birth, for her labor pains came upon her." The troublesome news triggered her labor.

"And about the time of her death the women who stood by her said to her, "Do not fear, for you have borne a son." But she did not answer, nor did she regard it.

Then she named the child *Ichabod* (which means "No Glory"), saying, "The glory has departed from Israel!" because the ark of God had been captured and because of her father-in-law and her husband." She names her boy "No Glory"

"And she said, "The glory has departed from Israel, for the ark of God has been captured." What a tragedy when the glory of God departs from a life, a ministry, a church, a nation. Yet God has to write the name *Ichabod* time and time again.

Here's the result of a misplaced faith... defeat ensues... God's glory departs...

Faith is not superstition. God wants us to trust in Him – not in reminders, relics, or rituals... Edmund Burke once said, "Superstition is the religion of feeble minds." Real faith goes beyond the things of God and rests its hope in God alone.

Chapter 5, “Then the Philistines took the ark of God and brought it from Ebenezer to Ashdod. When the Philistines took the ark of God, they brought it into the temple of Dagon and set it by Dagon.” Ashdod was a capital of the Philistines.

After they capture the Ark, the Philistines bring it home to Ashdod to gloat over their victory and mock Israel’s God. In ancient times a battle was not just a contest between two armies – it pitted *your god* against *my god*. And in the minds of the Philistines their god, Dagon, had proven more powerful than Jehovah.

This is why they bring it to the temple of Dagon – set it next to their idol. Dagon was the fish-god. His lower torso was like a fish – his upper torso like a man.

Though the Ark was just a reminder and representation of God; nevertheless God is about to use the Ark to make a point to the Philistines. *They may have defeated Israel’s army, but Israel’s God remains unconquerable.*

“And when the people of Ashdod arose early in the morning, there was Dagon, fallen on its face to the earth before the ark of the LORD.” The disciples of Dagon get up in the morning and find the fish-god bowing before the Ark of Jehovah.

This seems a little fishy, but they chalk it up as an accident... “So they took Dagon and set it in its place again. And when they arose early the next morning, there was Dagon, fallen on its face to the ground before the ark of the LORD. The head of Dagon and both the palms of its hands were broken off on the threshold; only the torso of Dagon was left of it.” This is more than an accident. The idols head and hands are broken off. Jehovah is obviously way *a-head* of

Dagon.

It's interesting we often think it's up to us to defend God's reputation. But here His people have been unfaithful, yet God still sees to it that He gets glorified.

Verse 5 **“Therefore neither the priests of Dagon nor any who come into Dagon's house tread on the threshold of Dagon in Ashdod to this day.”**

Rather than admit the obvious and realize the superiority of Jehovah God, the Philistines removed the Ark and created a tradition. No human was allowed to enter the floor of the temple. The priests stayed away from Dagon's statue.

Hey, it was easier to just glue together their idol - than to admit their sin and change their lifestyle. Like folks today, rather than open up the windows of their mind and heart to God's truth - they'd prefer to live with the stench of rotten fish.

Verse 6, **“But the hand of the LORD was heavy on the people of Ashdod...”** The hands of Dagon broke off - but the hand of Jehovah proved mighty.

And here's the only time I've ever been tempted to feel sorry for a Philistine...

We're told, **“and He ravaged them and struck them with tumors both Ashdod and its territory.”** Rather than **“tumors”** the Old King James says *“emerods”*. The Hebrew word means *“a mound”* – and it comes from a word meaning *“to swell”*.

Here the Bible commentators fall into two camps. Some understand the word **“tumors”** to mean hemorrhoids. Others

think it refers to the bubonic plague...

Famous Old Testament scholars Keil and Delitzsch write, "According to the rabbis (it was a) swelling of the rectum". Trapp puts it, "(God was) beating Dagon upon his own dunghill, and smiting the worshippers on their hinder parts, paying their posteriors". Clarke refers to it as "the disease called the bleeding piles".

In the Septuagint – the Greek translated of the Hebrew Old Testament – verse 6 goes on to say, "And the cities and the fields of all that region burst up, and mice were produced, and there was the confusion of a great death in the city." God's plague may've been a combination of hemorrhoids and a rat induced disease.

Hey, if this was hemorrhoids this is a severe, serious, bare-knuckled judgment!

And remember this is before the days of suppositories and Preparation H. No doubt about it, this is no holds-barred judgment. *God hits below the belt* - literally.

Here's a true story I clipped from the newspaper several years ago...

"Dateline: New York. A woman bedridden after hemorrhoid surgery became infuriated with her husband for leaving her alone while he went fishing and shot him to death when he got home, police said.

Authorities said seeing her husband, Edward, traipse off with a cooler of beer to spend Sunday afternoon with his friends was too much for Gail Murphy, who was obliged to remain in bed on her stomach. When she heard him return six

hours later, she got up, walked to the porch with a shotgun and fired through the door, then called 911. Murphy, 47, died Monday morning.”

If this woman was truly tried by a jury of her peers – *and I mean fellow hemorrhoid sufferers* - I’m certain Gail Murphy was found *not guilty*.

Imagine the whole city of Ashdod suffering from a pandemic of hemorrhoids.

Everyone was crabby and crotchety. Everyone stayed home, and took a sits bath. The consensus would be, “*we’re outflanked*”. “*Let’s get this thing behind us.*”

Thus verse 7, “**And when the men of Ashdod saw how it was, they said, "The ark of the God of Israel must not remain with us, for His hand is harsh toward us and Dagon our god."** Therefore they sent and gathered to themselves all the lords of the Philistines, and said, "What shall we do with the ark of the God of Israel?"

And they answered, "Let the ark of the God of Israel be carried away to Gath."

So they carried the ark of the God of Israel away. So it was, after they had carried it away, that the hand of the LORD was against the city with a very great destruction; and He struck the men of the city, both small and great, and tumors broke out on them.” God’s judgment follows the Ark. His *wrath* now gets poured out on *Gath*. Suddenly, everyone in the city of *Gath* is now taking a sits *bath*.

The men of Gath send the Ark to the city of Ekron, and look

at verse 10, “the Ekronites cried out, saying, ‘They have brought the ark of the God of Israel to us, to kill us and our people!’” Hey, a bad case of hemorrhoids will pretty near kill you.

This time Gath fights back... “Therefore they sent the ark of God to Ekron.

So it was, as the ark of God came to Ekron, that the Ekronites cried out, saying, “They have brought the ark of the God of Israel to us, to kill us and our people!” After three cities and thousands of sittings baths the Philistines surrender...

“So they sent and gathered together all the lords of the Philistines, and said, “Send away the ark of the God of Israel, and let it go back to its own place, so that it does not kill us and our people.” For there was a deadly destruction throughout all the city; the hand of God was very heavy there. And the men who did not die were stricken with the tumors, and the cry of the city went up to heaven.

Chapter 6, “Now the ark of the LORD was in the country of the Philistines seven months.” It took just 7 months - and a plague of hemorrhoids for the Philistine nation to surrender to God, and send the Ark back to Israel.

The Philistines, and many a man since, were *humbled by hemorrhoids*.

“And the Philistines called for the priests and the diviners, saying, “What shall we do with the ark of the LORD? Tell us how we should send it to its place.” They didn’t want to do anything else to infuriate the God of Israel, so they call in their

religious scholars to tell them how God would want the Ark to be transported.

“So they said, "If you send away the ark of the God of Israel, do not send it empty; but by all means return it to Him with a trespass offering. Then you will be healed, and it will be known to you why His hand is not removed from you."

Then they said, "What is the trespass offering which we shall return to Him?"

They answered, "Five golden tumors and five golden rats, according to the number of the lords of the Philistines. For the same plague was on all of you and on your lords. Therefore you shall make images of your tumors and images of your rats that ravage the land, and you shall give glory to the God of Israel; perhaps He will lighten His hand from you, from your gods, and from your land." The golden rats and hemorrhoids were the Philistine's acknowledgement that the plague was no accident. It was from God. They gave God glory for His judgment.

They're reminded in verse 6, “Why then do you harden your hearts as the Egyptians and Pharaoh hardened their hearts? When He did mighty things among them, did they not let the people go, that they might depart?”

“Now therefore, make a new cart, take two milk cows which have never been yoked, and hitch the cows to the cart; and take their calves home, away from them. Then take the ark of the LORD and set it on the cart; and put the articles of gold which you are returning to Him as a trespass offering in a chest by its side.”

This is obviously, God wanted the Ark moved. It was never to be on a cart. The priests carried it on poles. But this is the plan of pagan Philistines.

“Then send it away, and let it go. And watch: if it goes up the road to its own territory, to Beth Shemesh, then He has done us this great evil. But if not, then we shall know that it is not His hand that struck us - it happened to us by chance.”

Note they doubt to the end. The plague followed the Ark to three times - shifted direction every time the Ark moved. How could this not be a plague from God?

The Philistines are still holding out hope? They'd like to save face!

Verse 10... “Then the men did so; they took two milk cows and hitched them to the cart, and shut up their calves at home.” Evidently, they didn't want the calves to follow the mamas. “And they set the ark of the LORD on the cart, and the chest with the gold rats and the images of their tumors.”

“Then the cows headed straight for the road to Beth Shemesh (this was an Israeli city on the Philistine border), and went along the highway, lowing as they went, and did not turn aside to the right hand or the left.”

The direction of the cows confirmed once and for all that the plague of hemorrhoids, and rash of rats, had truly come from the God of Israel.

“And the lords of the Philistines went after them to the border of Beth Shemesh.” These guys had to go up the road to see for themselves....

“Now the people of Beth Shemesh were reaping their wheat harvest in the valley; and they lifted their eyes and saw the ark, and rejoiced to see it.

Then the cart came into the field of Joshua of Beth Shemesh, and stood there; a large stone was there. So they split the wood of the cart and offered the cows as a burnt offering to the LORD. The Levites took down the ark of the LORD and the chest that was with it, in which were the articles of gold, and put them on the large stone. Then the men of Beth Shemesh offered burnt offerings and made sacrifices the same day to the LORD. So when the five lords of the Philistines had seen it, they returned to Ekron the same day.” They’d beaten the Israelis, but they were unable to whip God. Katyusha rockets are nothing compared to hemorrhoids.

“These are the golden tumors which the Philistines returned as a trespass offering to the LORD: one for Ashdod, one for Gaza, one for Ashkelon, one for Gath, one for Ekron; and the golden rats, according to the number of all the cities of the Philistines belonging to the five lords, both fortified cities and country villages, even as far as the large stone of Abel on which they set the ark of the LORD, which stone remains to this day in the field of Joshua of Beth Shemesh.”

All seems well, until we read verse 19...

“Then He struck the men of Beth Shemesh, because they had looked into the ark of the LORD. He struck fifty thousand and seventy men of the people, and the people lamented because the LORD had struck the people with a great slaughter.”

Old Testament scholars have noted that several of the Hebrew manuscripts provide a different reading, “**Seventy men were struck dead out of 50,000.**” The Jewish historian, Josephus, also lists the death count at 70 – not the 50,070.

You’ve heard the expression, “**curiosity killed the cat**”? Well, it killed more than a cat in Beth Shemesh. The men of the city let their curiosity lead’ them into sin.

They opened the Ark to look inside, and violated its sacredness – its holiness.

The Ark wasn’t *a jewelry box* – or *a hope chest* – you pop the top and have a peek. The Law of Moses was clear – only certain priests - the family of Kohath - were allowed to handle the Ark. And they never lifted the lid to gaze inside.

Tonight’s chapters teach us there are two extremes we can go with the things of God... We can over-value them, and put our trust in the things of God rather than God. This is what Israel did when they took the Ark into battle...

Or we can fail to acknowledge what the things of God represent. We end up disrespecting what God calls holy. Carelessness and flippancy cause trouble.

Here’s an example, in one sense your Bible is just paper, print, and cowhide - but in another sense it’s a sacred book. It’s literally, God’s Word to mankind.

Now, don’t go to one extreme and turn your Bible into an idol. But don’t go to the other extreme either, and throw your Bible around like a comic book. Here’s where we need to strike a balance. *Trust God, but respect the things of God.*

Vs 20 “And the men of Beth Shemesh said, "Who is able to stand before this holy LORD God? And to whom shall it go up from us?" So they sent messengers to the inhabitants of Kirjath Jearim, saying, "The Philistines have brought back the ark of the LORD; come down and take it up with you."

Chapter 7, “Then the men of Kirjath Jearim came and took the ark of the LORD, and brought it into the house of Abinadab on the hill, and consecrated Eleazar his son to keep the ark of the LORD. So it was that the ark remained in Kirjath Jearim a long time; it was there 20 years.” The Ark will stay in Kirjath Jearim for the next two decades – until David becomes king, and brings the Ark up to Jerusalem.

Why the Ark wasn't returned to Shiloh - we don't know. It's possible the Tabernacle was damaged in the battle where the Ark was captured.

For the next 20 years, while the Ark is in Kirjath Jearim, Samson will wage a one-man guerrilla war against the Philistines. Though Samson will win some impressive victories, the nation as a whole will stay under Philistine control.

It takes Samuel to rally the people, and expose their need for revival.

Verse 2, “And all the house of Israel lamented after the LORD.” Carrying the Ark into battle didn't guarantee victory, and getting it back didn't guarantee God's blessing. The people of Israel were painfully aware that they weren't right with God.

In verse 3 Samuel addresses the nation “Then Samuel spoke to all the house of Israel, saying, "If you return to the LORD with all your hearts, then put away the foreign gods and the Ashtoreths from among you, and prepare your hearts for the LORD, and serve Him only; and He will deliver you from the hand of the Philistines."

Here Samuel gives us the keys for revival in any generation. For a personal revival – or for a corporate revival - here’s the way God revives His people...

First, **return** to God with all your heart. Exalt Him to His rightful place in your life.

Second, **remove** foreign gods. Rid your life of all that rivals your devotion.

Third, **ready** your heart. Stir up an expectation of what God will do.

Fourth, **reserve** your efforts and energies for God alone. Serve Him only!

Return, remove, ready, and reserve – and God will *revive* a cold heart.

“So the children of Israel put away the Baals and the Ashtoreths, and served the LORD only. And Samuel said, "Gather all Israel to Mizpah, and I will pray to the LORD for you." They obeyed the words of Samuel and gathered to Mizpah.

Mizpah was a location seven miles north of Jerusalem. It was easily accessible from all over Israel... And here Samuel holds a national Day of Prayer – a prayer meeting for the nation. Samuel is going to lead the nation against the

Philistines, but he realizes that every victory for God is first won on your knees – in prayer.

Verse 6 “So they gathered together at Mizpah, drew water, and poured it out before the LORD.” Samuel performs a ritual to symbolizes their new commitment. He pours out water... can you think of a more irreversible act than that?

Hey, once a liquid tumbles from a container it can never be fully retrieved. When it's gone - it's gone. This is the kind of commitment God requires from us - an irreversible act. “*Lord, I give my life to you, and I'll never take it back.*”

Remember Twiggy Sanders of the Harlem Globetrotters. He had a routine he did with a basketball on a rubber band. He'd throw it up, but it would snap back. Too many people have a Twiggy Sanders commitment to Christ. They give their heart to Jesus - but then take it back. We need to pour out our lives to the Lord.

Verse 6 “And they fasted that day, and said there, “We have sinned against the LORD.” And Samuel judged the children of Israel at Mizpah.”

Now when the Philistines heard that the children of Israel had gathered together at Mizpah, the lords of the Philistines went up against Israel. And when the children of Israel heard of it, they were afraid of the Philistines.

So the children of Israel said to Samuel, “Do not cease to cry out to the LORD our God for us, that He may save us from the hand of the Philistines.” And Samuel took a suckling lamb and offered it as a whole burnt offering to the LORD. Then

Samuel cried out to the LORD for Israel, and the LORD answered him.”

“Now as Samuel was offering up the burnt offering, the Philistines drew near to battle against Israel.” The Philistines strike first. “But the LORD thundered with a loud thunder upon the Philistines that day, and so confused them that they were overcome before Israel.” As Samuel interceded God came to Israel’s defense.

God orchestrated natural phenomena in a supernatural manner to confuse the enemy. The Jewish historian, Josephus provides us an account of the battle...

“God disturbed their enemies with an earthquake, and moved the ground under them to such a degree, that He caused it to tremble, and... shake, insomuch that by its trembling, he made some unable to keep their feet, and... fall down, and by opening its chasms, he caused that others should be hurried down into them;”

Fissures in the ground opened and swallowed up some of the Philistines.

“After which he caused such noise of thunder to come among them and made fiery lightning shine so terribly round... them, that it was ready to burn their faces; and he so suddenly shook their weapons out of their hands, that he made them fly, and return home naked.” They got a lightning tan. Their faces were singed.

Lightning cracked and the earth shook so severely they dropped their sword, and turned into streakers. Even iron weapons are no good if you can’t hold them.

“And the men of Israel went out of Mizpah and pursued the Philistines, and drove them back as far as below Beth Car. Then Samuel took a stone and set it up between Mizpah and Shen, and called its name Ebenezer, (which means “stone of help”) saying, "Thus far the LORD has helped us."

I love this thought... We've got a long way to go, but so far the Lord has been our rock – our help - everything we need. *Don't you feel that way about your life?*

One of my favorite hymns was written by a man named Robert Robinson.

It's entitled, *“Come Thou Font of Every Blessing, tune my heart to sing Thy grace; streams of mercy, never ceasing, call for songs of loudest praise.”*

But here's the second verse, *“Here I raise my Ebenezer; here by Thy great help I've come; and I hope, by Thy good pleasure, safely to arrive at home...”*

“I raise my Ebenezer” by expressing my testimony... I pay tribute to God's past help, while declaring His future faithfulness. We've got a long way to go, but Jesus is my stone of help. Thus far, He's been my rock, and I know He'll bring me home.

Verse 13 *“So the Philistines were subdued, and they did not come anymore into the territory of Israel. And the hand of the LORD was against the Philistines all the days of Samuel. Then the cities which the Philistines had taken from Israel were restored to Israel, from Ekron to Gath; and Israel recovered its territory from the hands of the Philistines. Also there was peace between Israel and the Amorites. And*

Samuel judged Israel all the days of his life.” As a young boy and as an old man – Samuel was God’s servant and Israel’s judge.

“He went from year to year on a circuit to Bethel, Gilgal, and Mizpah, and judged Israel in all those places.” Samuel was a circuit preacher.

During the 19th century as America went westward the rapid expansion and shortage of pastors created the need for the circuit preacher. One man served several churches in a given area. He usually made his rounds on horseback.

Evidently, Samuel was the very first circuit preacher.

Samuel made a loop each year among four cities - Bethel, Gilgal, Mizpah – and verse 17 - **“He always returned to Ramah, for his home was there.”** Ramah was home base. **“There he judged Israel, and there he built an altar to the LORD.”**