

## 1 Sam 4:1-11 [8]-RIGHT QUESTION-WRONG ANSWER

PRELIMS. All Israel realise that Samuel is to be a real prophet of the Lord. God is beginning to raise up a seed to serve Him!

### A DIFFERENT CULTURE

When reading the Bible, we need to know the prevailing culture of the times in order to benefit fully from the passage. Civilisation at this time was **primitive**. There was no means of communications as we have now, and **education** was not advanced so there were language difficulties and restrictions.

It was an **agricultural** economy – good **weather** was vital for the basic necessities of life. Survival depended on ‘Hunting, shooting (arrows) and fishing’! Life was pretty ‘**raw**’! Life was **not sophisticated** and the Bible does not conceal that fact!

Life was also **very religious**! Everybody believed in some god or gods. A plurality of gods rather than a single god was the order of the day – the Hebrews being exceptional in believing in **only one God**! They all attributed victory or defeat to their god or gods. There was no such thing as **atheism** then! Atheism is actually a very new thing in the world! Man’s ‘natural’ instinct is to believe in God or some Divine power greater than ourselves! Israel had the **reputation** of having a very **strong** God. News **did** circulate that their God was **powerful**. He delivered them from the Egyptians and drowned the Egyptians! Nations did **not trust** each other and **feared/suspicious** of each other. When there was a difference of opinion, there was little **negotiation** – the matter was very often settled by **warfare**! **Spilled blood** was a daily sight, whether of animals or humans! It was all part of daily life. The people did **not** find spilled blood horrifying, for it was a regular experience. **Cruel deaths** were commonplace. They were quite used to seeing dead corpses and would even **rejoice** over some!

So, it is **not surprising** to read, without any explanation “*Now*

*Israel went out to **battle** against the Philistines”*[1] We do **not** know **why** but that the Philistines and Israel never got on well!

## **DEFEATED!**

And “*Israel was **defeated**”*[2]! God’s people defeated? Yes! No doubt, they **prayed** they would be victorious! They would have said ‘Won’t **You** go forth with our armies?’ – a good prayer pleading covenant promises! They may even have prayed ‘Lord, we go in **Your Name**, let not the enemy **ridicule** and destroy **Your** Good Name!’ Yet they were defeated!

It still happens often to the people of God today! **Lesson:** It is: God **will suffer shame**, even to His own Name, rather than have His people **presume** they are faithful to Him, when they are not! Israel **presumed** they were in a **good relationship** with God – but they were not. They were really very far from Him! One of the **saddest** things about **backsliding** is that you are **not aware** of it! Israel could just **not understand** why God would allow them to be defeated! **APP** Do **you** sometimes wonder why God does not answer your prayers? Especially when you **are** doing the right thing at the time? But there may be something **else** in your life that God is angry about – and wants sorted **now!** Are **you** in a good relationship with God? When did you last have a **sweet** time with Him in prayer/fellowship, just the two of you alone enjoying one another? Recently?

We really do need to learn the lesson that God **is prepared** to allow us ‘**fail**’, and even ‘**look stupid**’ before an ungodly world, and to allow us have **unanswered prayers**, rather than have **us falsely believe** we are in a good relationship with Him! The ungodly triumphed and rejoiced over Israel, despite their calling for God’s help. The Philistines would have said all kinds of hurtful things to Israel. Yet God **allowed** it – just because Israel were not walking with God and God really wanted close relationship with them! God had a **plan** in the defeat – a plan to **bless** Israel - if they could but learn the lesson!

We need to realise the true nature of faith in prayer. Faith is **not** a **weapon** by which we **demand** things from God. It is **not** something with which we are able to **change** God's will. As Sam Storms says 'Faith is an act of **self-denial**...a **renunciation** of one's ability to do anything and a **confession** that **God** can do everything'. Faith points us away from ourselves towards God. Israel at this time simply thought that an **outward profession** of faith, a **loose** relationship with God would be enough to gain a victory. Well, God said 'No. I want Israel to realise faithfulness means **commitment**! Fulltime!

Israel indeed asked the **right question** "*Why has the Lord defeated us today*"[3] At least they still had a good **theology** - they knew that the **Lord** was the Ruler of all things! They knew God was behind it all! They still believed in God. Ralph Davis says, God will allow you to be **disappointed**, if it means you coming to realise the type of God he really is! He is a God who is **holy** and wants His people to **reflect** that holiness in their daily lives. Israel had been grieving God, and God was **feeling** that very much although it was the last thought in Israel's minds! **APP** Again and again this happened to Israel. Did they not learn anything from past experiences? Achan's sin [Josh 7] Or Job "*let me know why You contend against me*"[Job 10:2]

### **SOLUTION?**

The answer, they thought, was simple. Its the Ark – "*Let us bring the **ark** of the **covenant** of the **Lord** here, from Shiloh that it may come **among** us and **save** us from the power of our enemies. So the people...brought from there the ark...*"[3,4]

Now **for sure**, they would be **victorious**! Mistake!! Surely not! Yes. Their confidence was in the **Ark** of the Lord – instead of the **Lord** of the Ark!! They thought the **spiritual** presence of God was in some way **tied** to the **symbol** of His presence! The Ark was but the **symbol** of God in the midst! How **excited** they were "*all Israel gave a **mighty shout**....the earth resounded*"[5]

**APP** We Xns can also be **gullible/naive!** Whenever we want something, we have special prayer times to ‘twist God’s arm’ as it were to do it the **way we want**, instead of pleading with Him to do it **His way** in **His time** as **He will!** Why do we ask Him to build up our churches? Is it really for Him or for us? Are we prepared to put in the hours required to build up the church or do we expect Him to do it **overnight?**

Trust in the presence of a symbol is **worldly** and **unspiritual!** Proof is the Philistines “*were afraid...when they learned...they said...’A god has come into the camp’*”[7]! Their **superstitions** would come into play! “*Woe to us! Who can deliver us from the power of these mighty gods?*” **APP** We need to remember that our enemies and unbelievers have **unfounded fears** about truth! They get far more **worried** about reality that you think. The **bravado** disappears very easily and quickly. Ultimately they are **unsure** of their foundations. Remember **Stalin** on his deathbed rising up with ‘clenched his fist toward heaven’! **Hume:** At the end when alone was in ‘unutterable gloom’ and on deathbed ‘declared he had been in search of light all his life but was now in greater darkness than ever’![Blanchard p52]

Well, there was a **greater defeat** than ever! And guess what? “*the ark of God was captured*”[11] The very symbol of God captured!! As if God was truly mocking them? **Disaster?**

Not really! A far greater ‘work’ was going on. God was raising up a seed to serve Him. To do that, the **present regime** had to be removed – because they were the **cause** of God’s **displeasure**. There were **two characters** particularly who were **responsible!** “*the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas died*”[11] God had to **remove** them! Reason? Because they **sinned?** No!! Rather, because they would **not repent!** Judgment begins at the house of God! If the Church does not repent, what hope for the world? The **good news** is that in the long term, judgment usually ends up in a blessing! Purifying!