

# Lesson 53: The God of Israel Cannot be Captured

1 Samuel 4-7 (pg. 106-107, Gospel Story Bible)

## Teaching Points:

**Power lies not in objects, but only in God** -- After the Philistines defeat Israel in a battle, the elders of Israel wonder why this defeat happened. Unfortunately, they fail to ask God. Had they asked God, through his prophet, they would have learned that they lost the battle because they are not following God.

When Israel brings the ark to the battleground, they show they do not understand the ways of God. They do not think about their lack of faithfulness, their disobedience, or their lack of repentance. Their trust is in the objects and rituals of their religion, not in God. They think a decorated wooden box can save them. Instead, they lose the battle and the ark of God is captured.

**God demonstrates his mercy in the midst of Israel's defeat** -- Although the ark is captured, God doesn't allow it to be destroyed. In fact, wherever the Philistines take it, God brings judgment on their people and their false gods. In spite of Israel's sins, God remains faithful to his people and judges the Philistines.

**God brings the ark home** -- During the seven months the ark is with the Philistines, they develop a holy fear of God. God gives the Philistine priests wisdom about how to return the ark and lift the curse from their people. In some ways, the Philistines seem to fear God more than the Israelites do! When they set the cows loose pulling the ark on a cart, God leads the cows directly back to the people of Israel. The ark may have been taken from Israel for a while, but it was never out of God's control.

## Where is the Gospel?

### How does today's Bible story fit into God's greater plan of redemption?

Read 1 Samuel 7:1-11.

Samuel's offering of a lamb (1 Samuel 7:9) was a picture of Jesus, the Lamb of God, who died on the cross to save us from our sins. While Samuel was sacrificing the lamb, the Philistines were marching against Israel to attack. But because Israel confessed their sins and offered up a lamb, God remembered his promises to Israel and turned against the Philistines and defeated them.

Every time we see a lamb sacrificed for sinners in the Bible, it should remind us of God's plan to send Jesus to die on the cross in our place.

### Bible Truth:

God is not our good luck charm.

### A Little Bit More (grades 3-5) - The Ark of the Covenant

The ark of the covenant (also called the ark of the testimony or the ark of God) was a wooden box covered with gold. On the cover, two cherubim faced each other so that their wing tips touched. The ark was one of the furnishings made for the tabernacle in Exodus 25. The ark was a visible sign of the presence of God in Israel—the Lord Almighty was "enthroned between the cherubim" (1 Samuel 4:4). The ark is also referred to as the "footstool of God" (1 Chronicles 28:2). God had Moses and Joshua lead the nation with the ark of God in the front, and the people came to understand that whenever the Lord's presence leads, he will bring victory. It was not the ark, but the presence and blessing of God that brought victory for Israel.

## Object Lessons:

### 1. An Empty Box is Just an Empty Box (Grades K-2)

#### Supplies:

- a wooden or cardboard box (optional: spray paint it gold, or decorate it).
- slip of paper on which is written Psalm 37:4, "Delight yourself in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart."

Tell the children that you have a very special wooden box. Tell them that you think it is very powerful. Ask them what they would ask for if they were granted one wish.

Ask a few children for their wishes, then give them the empty box and tell them to look inside and get what they wished for. They will open it only to find it is empty.

Ask the children what is missing? They should say it is only an empty box. Draw the parallel between your box and the ark of God from the story. Israel took the ark, which was only an empty box for they neglected to ask God to join them in battle.

Now retrieve the box and slip inside it the paper with Psalm 37:4. Now ask the children again to tell you what they would like to have. Pick a child whose desire is a biblical one, and have them open the box.

Have them read the paper out loud to the class. If they are not a strong reader, read it to the class yourself. Explain that if we delight ourselves in the Lord, he promises to give us the desires of our heart. That requires faith in God. After the ark of God returned, the people of Israel repented and put their faith in God. Then God enabled them to conquer their enemies!

### 2. Compare the Battles (Grades 3-5)

#### Supplies:

- pencils or pens
- copies of worksheet (one for each student)

If time, read through all the battles as a class. If you have less time, split the class into three groups, and have each group read one battle and answer the questions. Share together at the end.

Read the passages out loud and work through the first three questions as a class. Have the students record their answers on their worksheets. Then, have the students write their answers to the last two questions on their own, followed by a class discussion.

#### Read about three battles:

- a. The capture of the ark of God (1 Samuel 4:3–11)
- b. Gideon's victory over Midian (Judges 7:9–25)
- c. Joshua's victory over Jericho (Joshua 6:1–21)

#### Answer the following questions:

1. Who called the people to battle?
2. What was their strategy to win?
3. What was the outcome?
4. How is the battle in 1 Samuel similar to the other two? (The Israelites copied some of the details from past successful battles.)
5. How is the battle of 1 Samuel different? (The Israelites made a big mistake when they failed to honor God before battle. Hophni and Phinehas, the priests with the ark, were wicked men. God was not about to bless this charade. Israel could not manipulate God by moving the ark. The ark of God is not a good-luck charm.)