

PRECEPTS FOR LIFE

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P.O. Box 182218, Chattanooga, TN 37422-7218

1-800-763-1990/ www.precept.org

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SERIES: I Samuel, Part 1 (The Heart of a Leader)

FRIDAY

OPEN

I heard a story once about a young man whose life was saved in battle because the bullet that was fired right at his heart stopped in the midst of the New Testament that was carried in his shirt pocket. God had delivered him. But had God delivered him because he was carrying a Bible or had God delivered him because God had further plans for his life? That's a good question to ask and answer, isn't it?

PART ONE

Well it was plain in the opening that God used that New Testament to stop that bullet. And yet would God have kept him from being killed if he hadn't had that New Testament in his pocket? Does God rely on things that you and I hold or possess to preserve our lives? Or was He simply showing us a wonderful story, that here was a man who went into battle trusting the Lord? Well I want to take us to 1 Samuel, chapter 4 where we left off. Remember the children of Israel have been defeated by the Philistines. Now they're

going to go into battle again, but this time as they go into battle they're convinced that if they have the ark of the covenant of God with them, then they will be delivered from the power of their enemies, cause it's right there and let me read it to you in verse 3 of chapter 4. They said, "...Let us take to ourselves from Shiloh the ark of the covenant of the Lord, that it may come among us and deliver us from the power of our enemies." (1 Samuel 4:3b) Now would it be the presence of the Ark of the Covenant that would deliver them from their enemies or would it be the presence of the God of the Ark of the Covenant that would deliver them from their enemies? It seems that they were resting in the fact that the ark was present with them, and if the ark was present with them then surely they would win the battle. Now what you have to do is you have to stop and you have to ask, you know, did they have any basis for thinking like that? I mean did this just come out of the blue or is there some historical facts that would cause them to think this? Well, yes there are some historical facts and if they went back and they thought about the time when they were getting ready to cross the Jordan, and what I want us to do is go to Joshua, chapter 3 and look at the time when the children of Israel were getting ready to cross the Jordan River, which when you study the text you find out that it's at flood stage, and they're going to go across into the land that God promised to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and their descendants as an everlasting possession. But there are enemies in the land and they're going to have to go and fight these enemies. Now they're well aware of that. As they get ready to pass over, God instructs them to put the ark of the covenant before them to keep it about 2000 cubits in front of them so that they can keep their eyes on it and then Joshua tells the people in verse 5 of Joshua 3, "...Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the Lord will do wonders among you." (Joshua 3:5) Now watch that statement; "...tomorrow the Lord will do wonders among you." (3:5b) Not tomorrow, because you have the Ark of the Covenant, wonders are going to happen. Well when they get ready to go into the water the Lord speaks to Joshua and He says to Joshua in verse 8: "You shall, moreover, command the priests who are carrying the Ark of the Covenant, saying, 'When you come to the

edge of the waters of the Jordan, you shall stand still in the Jordan.”(3:8) So when they get to the waters of the Jordan it says it came about in verse 13, “...when the soles of the feet of the priests who carried the ark of the Lord, the Lord of all the earth, rest in the waters of the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan will be cut off, and the waters which are flowing down from above will stand in one heap.”(3:13) And that’s exactly what happened. As a matter of fact, they took that Ark of the Covenant and they stood in the middle of the Jordan and all the people passed by. And when they got to the other bank and the Ark of the Covenant moved to the bank on the other side of the Jordan, the waters then returned to the Jordan and once again overflowed its flood banks. All right, so we see, and Israel sees, hey, the presence of the Ark of the Covenant is there and it separates the waters. And He tells them, as they get ready to go in there that they are going to take their enemies. So you might want to remember that because He assures them that when they get into that country, that all the Hittites and Perizites and Jebusites and all those ites are going to be destroyed because God is going before them. When you come to Joshua, chapter 7, and surely all the children of Israel remembered that great time when they marched around Jericho, the first city that they were going to attack, and they marched around carrying the Ark of the Covenant one time each day. But on the seventh day they marched around the city seven times. And when they marched around the city the seventh time then they began to shout and when they began to shout then the walls fell down flat. And you want to make sure that you get that and you understand that, because it’s just supernatural that the walls would fall down flat. So that’s Joshua, chapter 6, verse 20. And it says, “...the people shouted with a great shout and the wall fell down flat, so that the people went up into the city, every man straight ahead and they took the city.”(Joshua 6:20b) They took the city and they had the Ark of the Covenant before them. So knowing all of that, it seems that they think that if the Ark of the Covenant is with them, they’re going to be able to take the Philistines. Well, they have this confidence and the fact that the Ark of the Covenant has come into the camp of the Israelites has caused the Philistines

to absolutely tremble, and they say in verse 7: "...‘Woe to us! For nothing like this has happened before. Woe to us! Who shall deliver us from the hands of these mighty gods?’”(1Samuel 7b-8a) Now let me just stop here and say, any time I find a woe in the Bible I mark it, and I color it orange in this kind of cloud that kind of drips down and then I color it brown. And I do that because it is like a disaster that is about to happen. And what I want you to see here is when they say in verse 8: “‘Woe to us! Who shall deliver us from the hand of these mighty gods?’”(4:8a) Now they think it’s a multiplicity of gods because they have a multiplicity of gods. These are the gods who smote the Egyptians with all kinds of plagues in the wilderness. Now what are they remembering? They’re remembering something that happened about 395 years earlier. It made such an impression on the people that it was passed down from generation to generation what the gods, and I’ve got quotes around that, what the gods of Israel had done to the Egyptians. And yet these Philistines are going to be brave and they say in verse 9: “Take courage and be men, O Philistines, or you will become slaves to the Hebrews, as they have been slaves to you; therefore, be men and fight. So the Philistines fought and Israel was defeated....,”(4:9-10a) Whoa, wait a minute. The Jews were confident that if they went into battle with the ark of the covenant that they would win. The problem is they were trusting in this piece of furniture and not the God of the Ark of the Covenant, and that’s where they made their mistake. What’s wrong? Israel is in sin. And when Israel is in sin it doesn’t matter what they have going with them they’re not going to be victorious. The young man that went into battle and the bullet stopped in the New Testament, that young man’s days were not over. And God used that little instrument, but it wasn’t as if the young man would have died if it hadn’t been there, because it’s God that’s in charge. Do you understand? It’s not a rabbit’s foot; it’s not an icon; it’s not a cross around your neck. It’s not any physical tangible thing that is going to rescue you beloved. It is God; it is God. And you and I need to look beyond the tangible things, and go beyond those to the God that is behind them and make sure that our relationship is right with Him. Remember when I told you about that

song, I don't care if it rains or shines as long as I have my plastic Jesus sitting on the dashboard of my car. In other words, I think I'm all right because I have that plastic Jesus. Some people think they're all right because they have a saint sitting there. And they think okay, I'm praying to this saint. I have a little statue of St. Ann or I have a little statue of this saint or whoever's going to protect me. That's going to protect you. A lot of people go into battle and they will carry something because they think as long as they have that object they are safe. But safety is in the hands of the Lord. The Lord says, "The horse is prepared [against] the day of battle, but [safety is of] the Lord." (Proverbs 21:31) And what happened was God defeated Israel. "...every man fled to [their] tent; and the slaughter was very great, for there fell of Israel thirty thousand foot soldiers." (1 Samuel 4:10b) 30,000 foot soldiers. And they thought that they were going to be all right. And it says, "And the ark of God was taken...;" (4:11a) Not only did the Philistines defeat the Israelites, but the Israelites couldn't even hold on to the ark of the covenant. And listen to what it says: "...and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, died." (4:11b) Now didn't God tell Eli that this was what was going to happen, that he would lose two sons in one day? You see what God says will surely come to pass and no rabbit's foot, no statue, no icon, no cross around your neck, no New Testament in your pocket can stop God's hand of either judgment or God's hand of mercy and grace and preservation. Our security lies not in things, but it lies in God, in the person of God, in the character of God, in the work of God. So what happens on that day? Well it's very exciting to see and very interesting to look at because a man of Benjamin runs from the battle line and comes to Shiloh that same day with his clothes torn and dust on his head and he brings a message. And what happens to Eli? We'll see right after this break, right after this break.

PART TWO

In one day Eli lost his two sons and yet you know what beloved? That was not what brought him the greatest grief. Let's read on in 1 Samuel, chapter 4

and see what happens. In verse 11 it says: “Now a man of Benjamin ran from the battle line and came to Shiloh the same day with his clothes torn and dust on his head.”(1Samuel 4:12) Now as he runs and he has his clothes torn and dust on his head, he’s giving the message before the people ever hear it come out of their mouth. His clothes torn, the dust on his head is saying hey, I’m bringing really bad news. And so the people, in a sense are kind of prepared. In verse 13: “When he came, behold, Eli was sitting on his seat by the road eagerly watching, because his heart was trembling...,”(4:13a) now watch what it was trembling for, “...[it] was trembling for the ark of God.”(4:13b) Eli knows he’s going to lose both sons. He knows it because he knows that God has spoken. God has confirmed to him twice that his sons are going to die. But Eli, and you have to credit him here; Eli’s greatest concern is the ark of God. Why? Because everything in that temple at Shiloh moved to that one point. Everything in that temple centered around the Ark of the Covenant, because this was the representative of the very throne of God. Now if you don’t understand that, you need to read Hebrews 8, 9 & 10 and that will bring you into context, if you don’t understand about the Ark of the Covenant. All right, verse 13, and I left you off without the last sentence. [“Eli’s sitting by his seat on the road, eagerly watching because his heart is trembling; it must be fluttering for the ark of God.”] “...So the man came to tell it in the city, and all of the city cried out. [And] When Eli heard the noise of the outcry he said, ‘What does the noise of this commotion mean?’ [And] Then the man came hurriedly and told Eli. Verse 15: “Now Eli was ninety-eight years old, and his eyes were set so that he could not see...,”(1Samuel 4:15) so he couldn’t see the condition of this runner. He couldn’t see that his clothes were torn. He couldn’t see that there was dust all over him. He didn’t know that he was bringing bad news. All he heard was all this noise. And, “The man said to Eli...,” verse 16, “...‘I am the one who came from the battle line. Indeed, I escaped from the battle line today.’ [“And Eli says and, how,”] ‘How did things go, my son?’ [And] Then the one who brought the news replied, ‘Israel has fled before the Philistines and there has also been a great

slaughter among the people, and your two sons also, Hophni and Phinehas, are dead, and the ark of God has been taken.’ [And] When he mentioned the ark of God...,” not Eli’s sons, but, “When he mentioned the ark of God, Eli fell off the seat backward beside the gate, and...,” that must be the gate of the city, “...and his neck was broken and he died...,”(1Samuel 4:16-18a) Now listen to what it says: “...for he was old and heavy. Thus he judged Israel forty years.”(4:18b) Eli was what? Old. Yes, how old? Well we know that he’s 98 years old. But he’s also heavy. How did he get heavy? Well, remember when God spoke to him through the man of God. And when He said in verse 29 of chapter 2: “Why do you kick at My sacrifice and...My offering which I have commanded in My dwelling, and honor your sons above Me, by making yourselves fat with the choicest of every offering of My people Israel?”(2:29) In other words, this was a man that was fat because he had stolen the fat that belonged to God. And here he falls and here he dies. And what do we learn? We learn that he was a judge. He was a judge of Israel for forty years. And it says in verse 19: “Now his daughter-in-law, Phinehas’s wife, was pregnant and about to give birth; and when she heard the news that the ark of God was taken and that her father-in-law and her husband had died, she kneeled down and gave birth, for her pains came upon her. And [it came] about [at] the time of her death [that]] the women who stood by her said to her, ‘Do not be afraid, for you have given birth to a son....’”(1Samuel 4:19-20a) Now one of the key words that you need to mark in this passage is every reference to dead or dying. So you would start marking in verse 17 where Hophni and Phinehas are dead. Then you would mark verse 18 where Eli is dead. Then you would come to verse 19, when she gets news that her husband is dead and you would mark that. And then in verse 20: It came about at the time of her death. What I want you to see is this is not a pleasant story. This is a story of death and it’s death because of sin. It’s death that could have been prevented had Eli walked according to the Word of God; had he upheld the precepts for life, if he had lived by them, if he had judged his sons then his sons would not have to have been judged. No ark of the covenant could preserve the life of his sons. No ark of

the covenant could deliver the children of Israel because they had sinned. It wasn't that they could use this, so to speak as a holy rabbits' foot. No, because God had departed from them. Now watch what happens. ["when the woman says to her do not be afraid], "...for you have given birth to a son,' But she did not answer or pay attention. And she called the boy Ichabod, saying, 'The glory has departed from Israel,' because the ark of God was taken and because of her father-in-law and her husband. She said, 'The glory has departed from Israel, for the ark of God was taken.'"(4:20b-22) Now, Beloved, in these last few minutes I want to focus on one thing, the word glory. Because she said, ["...she named him Ichabod, which means the glory has departed from Israel."] (1Samuel 4:21a Paraphrase) The Hebrew word for glory is kabod, k-a-b-o-d and it comes from a word that means heavy, weighty, honorable, impressive or worthy of respect. In its context it takes on the sense of splendor, the reality of God's presence and it's used this way for the first time in Exodus, chapter 16, verse 7. And God is speaking to the children of Israel and they're hungry and He's going to give them manna. And He says in verse 7, "...and in the morning you will see the glory of the Lord, for He hears your grumblings against the Lord; and what are we, that you grumble against us?" (Exodus 16:7) So He's going to give them that bread, that manna, that supernatural bread on the surface of the earth that's going to show His glory. It's going to show here is a God that is able to provide food for you. Look at verse 10. "[And] It came about as Aaron spoke to the whole congregation of the sons of Israel, that they looked toward the wilderness, and behold, the glory of the Lord appeared in the cloud."(16:10) Now we come to Exodus, chapter 40 when the tabernacle was built then the glory of the Lord fills the tabernacle, Exodus, chapter 40, verse 34. Now the Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament says this: "That God wishes to dwell with men, to have His reality and splendor known to them. But this is only possible when they take account of the stunning quality of His holiness and set out in faith and obedience to let that character be manifested in them." The glory of the Lord had departed because the children of Israel had departed from the Lord.