



# VILLAGE BIBLE CHURCH SUGAR GROVE CAMPUS

## Shattered Religion

When life goes to pieces | Part 3

Tim Badal | October 11, 2015 | 1 Samuel 4-7



We're in a series entitled "Shattered" in which we're looking at some individuals whose lives were shattered by circumstances, trials, tribulations or sinful decisions they made. The book of 1 Samuel is chock-full of shattered lives. From this fall through the beginning of December, we're taking a look at the shattered lives of people in 1 Samuel so we can see that we are all shattered as a result of our sin and rebellion against God, and how that affects our lives on a daily basis. We also want to recognize and learn that God is the answer to our brokenness.

We started this series looking at shattered expectations through the life of Hannah who was a woman who struggled with infertility and a difficult marriage, yet God was able to plant in her a heart of faith and obedience. Last week we learned a very difficult lesson about the role we play as parents. We looked at the shattered parenting style of Eli the priest and how his children didn't walk with the Lord because of Eli's lackadaisical parenting.

Today we see that our shattered lives can impact even how we worship. We're going to look at a large portion of Scripture, so I want to give a list of highlights and a brief summary of chapters four through seven. In 1 Samuel 4 we find the people of God, the Israelite nation, at war with their neighboring enemy the Philistines. Israel went out to fight the Philistines in battle and they lost. Four thousand of their soldiers were killed in battle. When the Israelites came back from the battle they asked this question: why did God allow them to be defeated? That's a good question. They were God's chosen people and they knew God was their God and on their side, yet they lost to a pagan group who were enemies of God and His ways. So they asked themselves why in the world this happened.

Instead of asking God the question, they asked it among themselves. "Why would God do this? Maybe we need to change our strategy." And the decision was made that they would bring the Ark of the Covenant from the temple in Shiloh where Eli's sons, Hophni and Phinehas, are priests. The Ark of the Covenant was a box that was created out of the finest materials of the earth, and it was built as a symbol of God's presence among the people. It contained the Ten Commandments that Moses brought down from Mount Sinai. It contained a portion of manna that the Israelites had received while wandering through the wilderness before the Promised Land. It also had Aaron's staff and some other prized possessions from Israel's history. They said, "We're going to bring the Ark of the Covenant here because if we bring it into battle we'll be victorious."

So under the leadership of Hophni and Phinehas (4:4) they brought the Ark of the Covenant to Aphek, then went out once again to fight the Philistines. They were expecting a different outcome. But here's the problem: the only difference in the outcome was that they didn't lose 4,000 men but 30,000, including the lives of Hophni and Phinehas. We learned last week that they would lose their lives on the same day and that Eli would grieve and cry out in anguish when he heard it. That's exactly what happened. After the battle was over a messenger ran the entire way from the battle to explain to Eli the death of his two sons and asked him, "What are we to do?"

When Eli heard about their death and that the Ark of the Covenant had been captured, he was overcome with grief. In anguish he fell out of his chair, broke his neck and died. What an incredibly sad moment! Not only had the two priests of Israel died but now the high priest, Eli, was also dead. They lost 34,000 men in a short season of time and it seemed as if it couldn't get any worse.

At the end of chapter four Eli's daughter-in-law, who was married to Phinehas, was about to give birth. There were complications during the delivery and when the baby was born the mother died. Her last words before she died were, "*The glory has departed from Israel*" (4:22). You can't get any darker in Israelite history than what we see in 1 Samuel 4.

Then 1 Samuel 5 is the story of what transpired after the Philistines captured the Ark of the Covenant. The most prized possession of the nation of Israel was in the hands of the Philistines. They recognized that it had power. There was something about this Ark of the Covenant that was important. They recognized there was something holy about the Ark of the Covenant and they placed it in the temple of their god Dagon. They put the Ark of the Covenant in Dagon's temple because they thought if they put the Israelite God and their best god together they would create a super god. They thought by doing that they would become the most powerful nation because they didn't just have one god but two gods. So they merged them together to create a super god and be victorious in all that they did.

God had other plans, though. The first night that the Ark was placed in the temple of Dagon, the statue of Dagon fell face down as if worshipping the **God of Israel**. The priests and the Philistines came in and said, "This is bad press! We've got to fix this." So they put the statue of Dagon back in his place. It would be a very humiliating thing if it got out that the statue of their god was worshipping their enemy's God.

So they went back to bed and when they woke up in the morning, Dagon was face down on the ground in front of the Ark of the Covenant again. Only this time, as if it couldn't get any worse than before, his hands and head had been severed from his body as if God was saying, "There are no other gods before Me." When you mess with God and His glory, bad things happen. The Philistines learned this in 1 Samuel 5.

The entire time the Ark of the Covenant was in the land of the Philistines bad things happened. Boils and tumors began to grow on the people. Wherever the Ark of the Covenant went these tumors grew and people would die. It got to the point that the Ark became like a hot potato in the land of the Philistines. "We don't want it! Give it to them." "We don't want it! Give it to them." And wherever it went calamity fell on them.

Then in chapter six the Philistines finally said, "Capturing the Ark of the Covenant has done us no good. Everywhere we take it calamity befalls our people. Nobody wants it. We have to figure out what to do with this. But we need to be very careful." So in chapter six the Philistines meticulously worked to figure out how to not offend this God and give Him back to His people the Israelites. So by looking at Israelite history and through the work of their own diviners and sorcerers, they came up with a plan and said, "We're going to do all that we can to not dishonor this God because this God is more powerful and far greater than anything we ever could have imagined. Let's get Him back to the other side because it is doing us no good."

In chapter seven the Ark of the Covenant is returned to the nation of Israel. The people were excited to see it come back. In that excitement some men looked with contempt on the **Ark** and they were killed because they did not see God in His glory as something to be revered. This is a reminder that God is serious about His glory.

Then we see God's grace. Amidst the falling of Hophni and Phinehas and the high priest Eli we see that God had a plan to redeem His people once again through the faithful and courageous leadership of Samuel the priest. In chapter seven we see that he was an obedient priest who called the Israelites to get rid of their foreign gods and bow their knees to the Lord alone.

Let's look at 1 Samuel 7:3-4:

<sup>3</sup>And Samuel said to all the house of Israel, "If you are returning to the LORD with all your heart, then put away the foreign gods and the Ashtaroth from among you and direct your heart to the LORD and serve him only, and he will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines." <sup>4</sup>So the people of Israel put away the Baals and the Ashtaroth, and they served the LORD only.

There is a story of a woman who was a flight attendant. She enjoyed her job but one flight had become particularly difficult. At the front of the plane there was a man who was making all kinds of inappropriate **advances** toward her. She didn't like it so she asked to go to the back of the plane. When she was assigned to the back of the plane there was another man who was making all kinds of flirtatious advances toward her as well. She was very unhappy with this and thought, "I've just got to get through this flight and everything will be fine."

She had to go back up to the front of the plane and the guy, who knew that the plane was about to land, saw that his opportunity was coming to an end. He was emboldened and took the key to his apartment and wrote on a piece of paper the address to the apartment and, "See you later tonight!" with a little smiley face. The lady didn't know what to do. She was so tired of these stupid advances that she came up with an idea. Wise beyond her years, she walked to the back of the plane and with a smile on

**Comment [E1]:** Two things here: please use regular numbers, not Roman numerals for references. Also, since he's pretty much sticking to these few chapters, we don't need to cite the book in these parenthetical notations.

**Comment [E2]:** We normally don't change the meaning of his content but I think an idol falling before God is more appropriate than an idol falling before an ornate box.

**Comment [E3]:** I'm shortening some of these so it's not so wordy. It's pretty obvious what he's talking about by now and it was fully stated in the previous line.

**Comment [E4]:** Advancement is a promotion...advance would be more suitable for this context.

her face handed the key and the note to the other flirtatious man. Can you imagine the disappointment at that apartment later that night?

I can assure you that none of us would put ourselves in that kind of situation but it is a great reminder of how we treat God at times. It's a reminder that when we as Christians seek for God to show up in our lives, but He doesn't, we are quick to ask the question, "God, why weren't You there?" In our disappointment we are quick to blame God instead of asking the question that those men should have asked in their disappointment: "Was our invitation inappropriate?"

The people of God wanted Him in their midst but they went about it in all the wrong ways. They wanted God but they didn't think they needed to respond and invite Him in a way that would be honoring to Who He is. They missed an opportunity and as a result they were disappointed.

This text reminds us that the way we approach God will determine how God responds to us. God's response was one of anger, judgment and avenging His glory because the people of God treated His role in their lives with contempt. As a preaching team we call that "shattered religion." Shattered religion is the belief that a symbol or activity of faith will bring about God's blessing and presence automatically. "I do \_\_\_\_ (fill in the blank with whatever you want) and God will do \_\_\_\_." If your Christian life is, "If I do this, this and this, then God will do this, this and that," then you are probably veering into shattered religion and not true religion.

## 1. The Characteristics of Shattered Religion

How do we know if our faith and religion are true and right? We have to look at a bad example of it which we see in chapter four where the people of God were wondering, "Is God on our side? Is God fighting for us?" We will see that He was not. So the question is why? It's a question that they asked themselves in 1 Samuel 4:3: "*Why has the LORD defeated us today before the Philistines...?*" In fact they even blamed God. They were trying to figure it out but couldn't understand it.

So what does this kind of religion look like? I want you to see four characteristics of shattered religion.

### Leaders without character

Shattered religion usually involves leaders without character. In 1 Samuel 4:4 we are told that after this battle the people asked what they needed to do. They decided they needed to bring the Ark of the Covenant, which was their most prized possession—almost like a mascot or lucky charm—into battle. Who did they talk to about this? Verse four says there were two guys who were at the center of this thinking: Hophni and Phinehas.

Who were Hophni and Phinehas? Last week we learned that they were the sons of Eli and the priests of God who in 1 Samuel 2 were called worthless men. These guys who were leading the charge were known by all of Israel to be menaces to society, sexually immoral men and men who treated the people of God and God Himself with utter contempt instead of serving the people of God and honoring God. These two men were leading the charge and said, "This is what we should do. How do we defeat our enemies? We will do this with God on our side." Had they asked God? No, they couldn't. Why couldn't they? Because in chapter two it says they did not know the Lord. So there were two corrupt and worthless men leading the people of God.

Throughout the Old Testament and into the New Testament it is abundantly clear that if you are going to serve as one of God's leaders over God's people then you must be a person of character. The New Testament speaks of elders who are men called to lead God's local church (like Village Bible Church). First Timothy 3:1 says these are to be men above reproach. It doesn't mean they should be perfect because no man can be perfect. Only our Savior is perfect. But godliness is the standard.

How are we to know whether our leaders are godly? Paul tells Timothy there are three ways you can see that.

1. Are they spiritually men of character? The Bible says they are to be above reproach. They are to be mature men of faith. The first question you need to ask of any spiritual leaders is: are they spiritually people of character? Do they love the Lord? Have they walked with the Lord for a long time? Does it look as if they've walked around the schemes of the Devil long enough that they won't fall into his trappings?
2. **How are they at home?** Paul tells Timothy that we are to look for men who are not just men of character spiritually but men who are of character domestically. Paul says they have to be a husband of one wife. That literally means to be a one-woman man. They have eyes only for their own wife.

**Comment [E5]:** Simply swapping these two phrases solved the dangling participle issue.

**Comment [E6]:** Added so each of these points starts with a question.

We know Hophni and Phinehas were not spiritually mature men. Strike one: they didn't know the Lord. Strike two: they were not men above reproach sexually. They were sleeping around with women at the entrance of the temple.

3. How are they socially? How does the world see them? How do others see them? Do they see them as temperate men? Are they lovers of money and self? Are they arrogant individuals? Or does the world see them as men who love God, love their families and love the people of God? Do they love unbelievers in the world? Do they have a good reputation with insiders in the church and outsiders in the world?

You can't bring on an elder whose workplace says, "That guy is a jerk." What good is that? What testimony is that? He must have a good reputation with those on the outside and those on the inside.

So for Hophni and Phinehas, strike one: they did not know the Lord. They were spiritually corrupt men. Strike two: they were sexually corrupt because of their acts of immorality. Strike three: in chapter two it says all of Israel was aware of the terrible lives these men lived. Worthless men were leading God's people.

We have to ask this question: why in the world would they follow such men? You may say, "I would never follow such men. I would never allow such a thing." There was something inherent in the lives of Hophni and Phinehas that continued to draw people back to worship there. They overlooked their sin.

What normally happens in our day and age is charisma and great gifting draw people. An example of this in the church very recently is a very well-known pastor, conference speaker and author who confessed he was having an affair. When he shared about his affair he said, "The reason I had the affair is because my wife was having an affair." This is a broken family. This is a family we need to be praying for who needs God's love, grace and truth brought into their lives. The elders of this mega-church where he was pastoring were wise and said, "You can't continue in an affair and be a pastor. You need to step away. We're going to ask you to resign." That's right and a good first step. A pastor cannot be in an inappropriate relationship and continue to preach. In August he filed for divorce. He said the relationship was irreparable.

Here's where the mistake comes. In all of this I want to extend God's grace and mercy, but three miles down the road is one of the largest evangelical churches in Florida. On September 2 they called and affirmed that same man to be their Director of Ministry Development. There's a problem here. Can a pastor who has fallen be restored? Yes, I think he can be. We can all be restored by God's grace and mercy, but it will take some time. Why would a church do that? Because gifting, charisma and popularity are things that cause us to say, "Character isn't as important as great charisma. We need that. That guy will help us grow our church."

Shattered religion begins when you start appointing leaders who are not only broken people, but also unqualified or disqualified individuals. If you're following disqualified leaders, no doubt your faith will become defective in some way, shape or form as a result of their leadership. That's why it is so very important that we look at those who are leading and ask the question, "Can I follow them?"

### Followers making bad choices

Before we think that it's just bad leadership, we must recognize that you can't have bad leadership without bad followers. A man who is leading but nobody is following is a man who is simply going on a walk. If nobody is following that leader he's by himself. Someone has to follow these bad leaders and in their case they were the people of Israel who had made wrong choices.

It's not just that Eli's sons were the ones to blame but there were people who were following them. They asked these guys, "What should we do? Who cares if you're sleeping around! Who cares if you don't know the Lord! Who cares that you're menaces to everything that goes on around the temple. Who cares about all that! You just tell us what we need to do." It seems a bit odd that these people were ignorant of the fact that these two men didn't know the Lord but they were seeking to know what God said about their circumstances through them. They made bad choices. Why does that happen? Because by nature we are dumb people.

This last week, on October 7, a church from the east coast announced to the world and all of its followers that God was going to destroy the world. The unbelieving world loves it when we do this. I saw it on USA Today's religion section as they talked about another doomsday prophecy and whether it would be true or not. The doomsday prophecy claimed that because of a bunch of numbers added together and because of the calendar that is allegedly embedded into Scripture itself, we can know when Jesus is going to return and destroy the world.

**Comment [E7]:** Oh this makes my heart ache! This guy was one of our clients before his confession. Also, I found this title online and felt it should be used instead of 'pastor' for accuracy. I've highlighted it just to remind myself to mention this change to Missy so they can change it back if they want to do so.

**Comment [E8]:** This just doesn't seem to belong here. I could be interpreted that his kids are morally corrupt.

I was working on Wednesday and looking forward to watching the big baseball game. I didn't want to just listen to it but watch it so I recorded it on DVR. To pass a little time before the game, I decided to listen to the guy's final message to his followers. What does a Bible study sound like when you know that you've got the answer to the end of the world? I listened to the 35-minute message and thought, "Who in the world would believe this guy? He's taking Scripture out of context all over the place for his own desires and theories."

Yes, we should look forward to the coming of the Lord. The Scripture says we should even hasten its day (2 Peter 3:12). The Bible **does** say that no one knows the hour or day that Jesus is coming back (Matthew 24:36). That Scripture never comes up in his Bible study. But he meticulously quoted from his "embedded" Bible, saying, "We can use the Bible to find out when the world will end." I could see on my phone that tens of thousands of people had listened to this guy. You've got to be kidding me! Maybe a thousand of those were people like me who were laughing at it the entire time.

**So there are bad followers of bad leaders.** How does that happen? It's when we put ourselves around teachers who have shattered religion. You don't have to look very long at America today to see that there is shattered religion and it is filling some of the biggest church buildings we have. People who are filling their pockets are leading some of the largest churches in America—millions upon millions of dollars are going into their own accounts. They are fleecing the people of God by feeding them this idea that their faith will produce wealth.

I want you to know that this shattered religion is seen all around and people are buying into it. The largest church in America is a church of shattered religion. Christians are watching and believing that if you speak positive words of faith you won't have health problems or money problems, and you'll be wise beyond your years. The problem is that just like the children of Israel, people are making unwise decisions **regarding who they follow.** So the Israelites followed them and what happened? They didn't lose 4,000 men but 30,000 men. What devastation must have come from that!

### Flawed convictions

In verse three they asked, "*Why has the LORD defeated us today before the Philistines?*" The flawed conviction isn't just the question but also how it was asked. The question itself was flawed. "God, why did You make us lose this battle? God, it's Your fault we lost!" They should have been asking the question, "What have we done to offend our God? Why has God allowed this trial in our lives and what do we need to do to fix it?"

You say, "Tim, they're asking the right question." Here's the thing: they're really not asking the right question because notice who they are not asking it of: God. Nowhere does it say, "And they turned to God and said, 'Lord, why did You allow this to happen?'" They asked the question amongst themselves. They asked the question amongst worthless men. The answer they got was, "We didn't bring out our lucky charm, the Ark of the Covenant. We didn't bring it and place it before our soldiers in battle." They had this false conviction that if they brought some item—that's worthless outside of what God has designed it for—then God would have to respond. But He didn't because without God's presence the Ark of the Covenant was just a box full of relics. With God's presence it was the most powerful tool because the most powerful God of the universe was present there. They missed that point. They brought the box but didn't bring God.

Some of us want the box of God instead of God Himself. We begin to have flawed convictions and think, "If we just bring God's box then everything will be okay," instead of inviting God into our battles.

### Faith without a center

In verse five the ark was brought into the camp and what did the people do? They cheered. They celebrated. This reminds me of our current-day sports. All kinds of football games happened yesterday and no doubt at the beginning of every one of those games the home team ran out of the tunnel and who led them? The mascot. The Israelites created a mascot out of the Ark of the Covenant. So the mascot showed up in town and they all started cheering. They were excited. If they understood that the Ark of the Covenant was a symbol representing the presence of God in their lives each and every day, they wouldn't have celebrated but rather gotten on their knees and begged for mercy. They saw it as something that was to be cheered because they thought it would help them in their hour of need instead of being a reminder to them of their unfaithfulness before a holy God. They had no center.

Here's the thing: we live in a world where people say they are people of faith. This happens all the time. I'm sure you've heard it like I've heard it. The question should be what is your faith in? Is your faith in God or in yourself? They had created an in-between. Their faith wasn't in God. It wasn't in themselves. It was in this religious item that had symbolism of God but not the

**Comment [E9]:** This seemed very confusing to me and I don't want readers to misinterpret what he is saying here.

**Comment [E10]:** Felt like we needed to bring this back around to the outline point so reworked this a bit more.

**Comment [E11]:** This is another one of Tim's frequent and strange phrases (like "in verse \_\_\_ it says...").

presence of God. Rather than inviting God into their midst they just wanted the symbol. They thought the symbol could work. We have churches that are filled with people buying into symbols instead of a Savior.

## 2. The Cost of Shattered Religion

So what happens? There is a cost for this kind of shattered religion. What happens when we put our faith in things rather than God? What happens when we use God as a means to an end? Three things take place.

### Trading true faith for superstition

In the athletic world you will see all sorts of superstitions. When the Black Hawks are in a playoff run they don't shave their beards. Apparently growing a long beard will help you put a hockey puck into a goal.

The great Chicago Bulls player—probably the greatest player in the history of basketball—Michael Jordan had a superstition that he needed to wear his North Carolina Tar Heel blue shorts underneath his Bulls uniform every game of his entire career. That's crazy!

Wade Boggs was a great player for the Boston Red Sox with an almost twenty-year career. There are 162 games in a year and before every game he ate the same dinner: chicken. I don't know what 162 games over a twenty-year period amounts to but that's a lot of chicken. I don't know how many different ways you can eat chicken but that's a lot of chicken! Why did he do that? Because of superstition. At some point he ate chicken and had a great game and said, "Why would I change it? Let's just keep it going."

We laugh and say, "How dumb!" We see the sign of a cross made before a guy gets into the batter box. We see men who put the sign of the cross in the dirt as they're getting up to bat. We see all kinds of crazy things like that, laugh and say, "How dumb!" That's what superstitions do.

Here's the problem: as Christians we do it also, but we're just more religious about it. "If I go into the waters of baptism or someone poured some water on my head as a baby then I'm going to heaven. It doesn't matter if I'm obedient or love the Lord with all my heart. Someone got me wet when I was a little kid and now I'm all good." "I'm not walking with the Lord but I prayed a prayer. I walked an aisle. I'm in. God loves me." "If I take this little wafer and drink this little cup I'm alright with God." "I attend church every Sunday therefore God is for me. God won't allow anything bad to happen." We've got our own superstitions. We mock those who have other superstitions. Other people's superstitions are always fun to watch but we don't want people to mess with ours.

Just recently someone came up to me and said, "Pastor, I have to share with you: God is so good! He is so wonderful! He helped me in my hour of need. I had a decision I needed to make and God spoke to me." I always have to interrupt when I hear this and say, "Did God really speak to you? That doesn't happen very often these days. Did you really hear from the Lord?" She said, "Well, I felt it in my spirit." [Okay, you felt it in your spirit. I'll give you that.] She continued, "Here's how God answered my prayer: I had a decision I needed to make and God told me to close my eyes, grab my Bible and open it and when I looked down the answer would be in that verse."

That's not superstition from some other church. That's happening here. I had to stop and say, "I sure hope it didn't say, 'The one who sins will surely die' (Ezekiel 18:20)." That's what we do. If we don't like the verse that comes up then we do it again as if we're playing Russian Roulette with God. God doesn't speak that way. God speaks through the whole counsel of His Word. God isn't about playing games. God gives us symbols. God gives us things that will aid us in holiness.

Shattered religion is when you seek God's help without seeking His holiness. Teenagers, maybe you're using prayer in your history class when you haven't studied at all for your exam. "Oh Lord, I know You are a good and great God. Lord, I need a lot of help here. I don't have any idea who Roosevelt is compared to Benjamin Franklin but I know because I'm praying You will help me pass the test." I've prayed those prayers and, let me assure you, they do not guarantee making the honor roll. You're taking a noble and good thing (prayer) and saying, "I can maneuver and manipulate this in such a way that if I want something God will do it." You've put God into a bottle and made Him your genie.

## Shattered religion cannot save you

The Israelites said, "We don't want God. We just want some of His power. We don't want God in all of His holiness. We just want His little box that will save the day." When you put your faith and trust in that, just know that shattered religion can't save you. I cannot imagine how many people are going to stand before Jesus Christ and say, "I'm Your follower," and Jesus will say, "I don't know you." "But I went to that church down there!" "I was baptized." "I walked an aisle." And He will say, "*I never knew you; depart from me*" (Matthew 7:23).

When we say we are people of God then God is in charge and we're not. We have to take all of God, not just part of Him. The Israelites liked the idea of God but they forgot to invite Him into their lives.

The Apostle Paul said we must beware of having an appearance of godliness while denying its power (2 Timothy 3:5). He says, "Timothy, be careful of those guys who talk a big game and talk about myths and genealogies but the power of God is not changing their lives." They don't have God in their lives.

## Shattered religion shrinks God in His glory

Long before the "Coexist" bumper stickers, the Philistines had this idea that if they could take not just one god but multiple gods and merge them together they could create a super god. When they got the Ark of the Covenant they knew it was a religious box. They could tell it was made with the finest of materials and had angelic beings built upon it. It was a beautiful and marvelous piece of craftsmanship. So when they saw it they asked, "What should we do with it?" The Philistines said, "Let's put it in the temple where we put our other gods. Let's put it in the temple of Dagon, our most powerful god who rules over the fish and sea." So they took the Ark of the Covenant and placed it on the same level as their other gods.

It is said that religion in America is dying. I say absolutely not. Religion in America is alive and well today. People will applaud you at your work place if you just say, "I believe in Jesus as one of many ways to God. I believe Jesus is my way to God. For my Islamic friends, Mohammed is their way to God. For my Hindu friends the teachings of Hinduism is their way to God. For atheists, it's the fight within themselves that is their way to God. We've all got our paths. We're walking up the same mountain." No one will be offended if you say Jesus is one of many. It's when you say Jesus is the One and Only that they want to beat you up. That's when they want to cut you down. Shattered religion that devalues God is alive and well today.

The Philistines said, "We're going to put this God with all our other gods." God said, "You've got another thing coming." Dagon had two bad nights. The statue of Dagon fell down as if prostrate before the Ark of the Covenant. That wasn't good enough for them so they put him back up. You know you're part of shattered religion when you've got to put your god back on his pedestal. "Let's help him back up." There's a problem with that. Can you imagine your god wearing a 911 medical alert bracelet? "I've fallen and I can't get up!" If you have to help your god get back up that's not a good god to follow.

So they put Dagon back up in his place. The next night the same thing happened except this time his head and hands had been severed. He was an impotent god with nothing going for him. They said, "We have to fix this. We can't have the Ark of the Covenant keep doing this. This will make our god look weak and broken." So what did they do? They sent it away.

Be careful! Shattered religion always tries to put God at the same level as other gods. This is the teaching of Oprah Winfrey today. I know some of you love Oprah because of her great programs. She is a false teacher who continues to say in interviews that Jesus is one of many ways to God. She is doing nothing different than what the Philistines did in the temple of Dagon. We must be careful. That shrinks God's glory.

Eli's daughter-in-law was about to give birth. On the day she was to give birth she learned that her husband and father-in-law had died along with thousands of other men. It was a bad day for her. In the midst of giving birth to a son she died as well. In 1 Samuel 4:22 her last words were, "*The glory has departed from Israel, for the ark of God has been captured.*"

That sounds like a pretty good statement but the problem is her rationale was, "The box of God is no longer in our possession thus God's glory is no longer in this place." Beware when things of God represent God's glory instead of God Himself. Be careful when certain things don't go the way you want them to that you don't determine that God is now no longer on His throne. The Ark of the Covenant had been captured but God was just getting started in showing His supremacy. God didn't say, "Oh no! My box is in the hands of other people. What can I do? I can't do anything now that I'm captured." No, God said, "Watch this!"

So what did God do? He knocked over statues and wherever the Ark of the Covenant went boils and tumors started to grow on the people. God said, "You can't mess with My glory. You can't shrink My glory. I will show you My glory in a powerful way.

Wherever that box goes you're going to see the hand of the almighty God in His vengeance upon the people who continue to try and reduce it."

God's glory is not in the things of this world—even in the sacraments that we have before us. God's presence isn't in baptism water that we revere as holy. God's presence isn't found in a wafer or a cup of juice. God's presence is larger than all of these. While these things may point to a picture of Who God is or how He deals with His people, in themselves they are not the presence of God.

With all due respect, this is where we differ from Roman Catholics. Roman Catholics will set up a tabernacle for bread because they say that in that bread dwells the presence of almighty God in body and blood. They believe God incarnates in bread form. We say, "No, Roman Catholics. That's a symbol. Jesus Christ is sitting at the right hand of the Father, not going back to the cross." So be careful when you start believing symbols to be the presence of God instead of God Himself.

That's why we can worship God in all places because God's presence is everywhere. He's not just in church buildings or symbols but everywhere. He resides over the land and the sea. He resides through His Spirit in you and me. Be careful!

### **3. The Corrections we Need to Make**

In chapter six the Philistines sought to relieve their suffering and trials. They tried to right the ship. First Samuel is full of contrasts. Last week we saw the contrast between the bad sons of Eli and the good son, Samuel. Eli's sons were doing bad things but everyone loved Samuel who was honoring God in all that he did. In 1 Samuel 1 we see the contrast between Hannah, a faithful woman who had no children, and Peninnah, an unfaithful and ungodly woman with multiple children. There are many contrasts in the book of 1 Samuel.

Here we see the contrast between the pagan people of the Philistines and the Israelites. The Israelites played games with God's box and didn't revere it, but the Philistines did. They recognized that this box signified the presence of almighty God Who is a serious God so they better deal with it seriously. It wasn't the people of God who figured it out first but the pagans. The pagans got it. You don't play with God. You shouldn't trifle with God. God is serious.

So the pagans went to their diviners and theologians and said, "We don't know this God very well. You have to help us figure this out." In chapter six they realize the Egyptians had run into this problem. So they started studying the Scriptures and Israeli history and said, "The Egyptians ran into this. We need to be careful how we respond. We must do it in a way that's humble and contrite." So they got a couple of cows that had never been hooked up to a cart, placed the Ark of the Covenant on a cart, and said, "God, wherever you want to send these cows, You send them. We want Your box to go back to the right place. We're putting it in Your hands. You do the leading. You do the guiding. We don't want You to come down on us anymore."

Here are four things that help correct a shattered faith:

#### **Recognition**

We must recognize that we shouldn't trifle with God. The Philistines got it. Some of us are playing games with God. We're playing, "If I do this then God has to do that." God doesn't have to do anything for you or me. We need to recognize that. He is God. We are not.

#### **Reverence**

There needs to be a proper reverence for God. Sadly the Philistines saw this before the Israelites did. They recognized they were playing games with God. We need to recognize that as well. Is God our One and Only? Is God the most powerful God in the entire world? Is He the One Who has invited us into a relationship with Him and called us to obedience? If we think obedience is optional then we have ceased to recognize that God is all-powerful. Because God is all-powerful, my only job is to obey Him and do what He says. He is everything.

#### **Repentance**

Shattered religion should lead us to repentance. After three chapters of missing it, God was gracious. God is always gracious, even in His discipline. In chapter seven, God raised up Samuel who, as a faithful priest, called the people back to God.

If you're involved in shattered religion notice what it involves. If you're going to return to the Lord, return with all your heart. You can't make it just somewhat of a priority. It has to be your total priority. Verse three says it means putting away foreign gods and directing your heart to the Lord, serving Him alone. The people of Israel got it and said, "We don't want to sin against the LORD any more. We see the calamity that fell upon the Philistines and now we recognize that God, as he disciplines the Philistines, may also discipline us. They plead with Samuel later in chapter seven and they say, "Please don't let this happen. Tell God that we're sorry. Tell God that we want to do what is right." And they begin to do it, and God delivers them once and for all from the Philistines. They don't have to wage war again for some time under Samuel's leadership.

## Remembrance

Correcting shattered faith also involves remembrance. Remember God is a Teacher. He says, "You have taken symbols and you have turned those symbols into good luck charms." God uses an example of a symbol. They've prayed, they've sought the LORD, and they've defeated the Philistines. *"Then Samuel took a stone and set it up between Mizpah and Shen and called its name Ebenezer; for he said, 'Till now the LORD has helped us.' So the Philistines were subdued and did not again enter the territory of Israel. And the hand of the LORD was against the Philistines all the days of Samuel" (7:12,13).*

God says symbols are okay when they point us to a greater understanding of Who God is and what God wants. That's why communion is so great; that's why baptism is so great. They are pictures of a greater spiritual truth — as we die in the grave as baptism teaches, as we die in our sin, we are raised as Christ was raised out of the grave in the newness of life. The old is gone; the new has come. What a great picture using one of the most abundant resources the world has.

God is a smart Teacher. He takes a rock and He says, "I know you blew it with the Ark of the Covenant." Symbols alone don't save, but they keep us in remembrance of this truth: God is always with us. He will help us, but the only way He will be with us is when we bow the knee in a spirit of repentance and contrite hearts — when we give back to God the glory due His Name.

How do we apply this? Stop playing games with God. See the seriousness of God in His glory. Do as the Israelites finally did: walk in accordance with His Word. And when you do, God says He will never leave you nor forsake you. I pray that you will strive through the Holy Spirit's help to that end.