

15.04 The Ark Is Taken (1 Samuel 4:1–11)

✓ “*Check*” it out; opinion, inference, supposed conversation, or fact one can verify follows
[. . .] indicates a remark to the teacher that usually should not be read. It also indicates answers to questions.

Visuals and Tools:

- Pictures and other visuals found at the end of this lesson. Please give credit to the sources of pictures.
- Check “Activities” and “Handwork” found below for additional materials.
- Chart of the tabernacle with furniture. Better, a chart of the basic tabernacle with separate furniture pieces that may be placed on the chart.

Bible Time Tips and Terms to Teach: Vocabulary words are enlarged for flashcards at the end of this lesson. Print, cut out, and glue to card stock, or just print on colorful cardstock.

- *ark of the covenant*: the piece of tabernacle furniture in the Holy of Holies. It represented the place where God lived among His people. No one could see the ark of the covenant except the high priest once a year or when he covered it for travel.

Scripture: (ESV)

1 Samuel 4:1 And the word of Samuel came to all Israel.

Now Israel went out to battle against the Philistines. They encamped at Ebenezer, and the Philistines encamped at Aphek. 2 The Philistines drew up in line against Israel, and when the battle spread, Israel was defeated before the Philistines, who killed about four thousand men on the field of battle. 3 And when the people came to 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 here from Shiloh, that it may come among us and save us from the power of our enemies.” 4 So the people sent to Shiloh and brought from there the ark of the covenant of the Lord of hosts, who is enthroned on the cherubim. And the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were there with the ark of the covenant of God.

5 As soon as the ark of the covenant of the Lord came into the camp, all Israel gave a mighty shout, so that the earth resounded. 6 And when the Philistines heard the noise of the shouting, they said, “What does this great shouting in the camp of the Hebrews mean?” And when they learned that the ark of the Lord had come to the camp, 7 the Philistines were afraid, for they said, “A god has come into the camp.” And they said, “Woe to us! For nothing like this has happened before. 8 Woe to us! Who can deliver us from the power of these mighty gods? These are the gods who struck the Egyptians with every sort of plague in the wilderness. 9 Take courage, and be men, O Philistines, lest you become slaves to the Hebrews as they have been to you; be men and fight.”

10 So the Philistines fought, and Israel was defeated, and they fled, every man to his home. And there was a very great slaughter, for thirty thousand foot soldiers of Israel fell. 11 And the ark of God was captured, and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, died.

Introduction/Review:

[Use the following chart by having students look up the references and contrasting Eli’s sons with Samuel.]

Ref.	Wickedness of Eli’s Sons (Hophni and Phinehas)	Ref.	Samuel’s Ministry
1 S 2:12	Sons of Belial; they knew not the Lord.	1 S 2:11	Child did minister unto the Lord before Eli the priest.
2:17	The sin of the young men was very great before the Lord; for the men abhorred the offering of the Lord.	2:18	But Samuel ministered before the Lord.

2:23–25	Eli scolded them a bit.	2:26	The child Samuel grew on and was in favor both with the Lord, and also with men.
2:27–36	The man of God told Eli all the curses to come upon his family.	3:1	The child Samuel ministered unto the Lord before Eli.
3:11–18	Samuel told Eli about all the curses to come upon his family as God had shown Samuel.	3:19–21; 4:1	Samuel grew, and the Lord was with him, and did let none of his words fall to the ground. And all Israel from Dan to Beer-Sheeba knew that Samuel was established to be a prophet of the Lord. . . . the Lord revealed himself to Samuel in Shiloh by the word of the Lord. And the word of Samuel came to all Israel.”

Years ago (and perhaps today), some people carried around a dried rabbit’s foot, trusting that having it would give them good luck. Other people placed in their cars a small image of a saint who was supposed to protect them as they traveled. Today we hear of people’s wearing a special shirt to a sports event so that it will give their favorite team good luck or playing with a special bat or ball because it might give good luck.

What does God think about lucky rabbits’ feet or statues or lucky clothes? What’s wrong with this idea? It is trusting something or some person rather than God, and it breaks the first and second commandments. Today we’re going to hear about Israel’s trusting a *thing* instead of God, even though God had blessed the *thing*.

Story:

Philistines fight

Several years had gone by since God had spoken to Samuel while he was in his bed. Israel and the Philistines had often fought each other. (Remember Samson’s stirring up the conflict?) At the time of today’s story, Israel was fighting against the Philistines at Aphek [locate]. Who would win? To answer that question, one needs to ask other questions. Was Israel obeying God? Were their leaders, the priests, obeying God? [No.] Who would win? The Philistines. In fact, the Bible states the Philistines slew 4000 Israelites (about half the population of my town, Lamar, Colorado). [Hold up four fingers and begin counting by hundreds to 1000 in order to show how many men that was.]

Israel wondered why God had let 4000 men be killed, but they didn’t ask God about it or pray to Him for victory. No. Instead they said, “Let’s get the ark of the covenant from Shiloh so that when it comes to us, *it* may save us from the Philistines.”

“Lucky” ark

What was their lucky charm? A rabbit’s foot? Special clothes? No, the ark of the covenant. If any *thing* could help God’s people, the ark could. But can any *thing* help us? No. Only God Himself will be able to turn around an impossible situation.

The people sent to Shiloh [locate at central northeast Ephraim] to get the ark (box) of the covenant. Only the priests were supposed to carry this; so Hophni and Phinehas, Eli’s sons, carried the ark to the battlefield. When the ark came into the Israelite camp, all the Israelites shouted, “Hooray!” so loudly that it sounded as if the earth were a clanging bell.

The Philistines heard the shouting and wondered, “What’s the great noise in the Israelite camp?”

When someone said, “It’s because of the ark of the God of the Israelites,” the Philistines were terrified. “God has come into their camp,” they cried. “We will surely die! This has never happened before! Who can save us from this mighty God, the God who killed all the Egyptians with plagues? Be strong men, you

Philistines, or you will have to serve these Hebrews! Fight like men!”

Philistine victory

So they fought hard. Who do you think won the battle? Would the ark of the covenant save Israel? No. In the terrible conflict that followed, Israel was beaten by the Philistines. All the Israelites who didn't die ran away—back home. More than 30,000 Israelites (more than three times Lamar, Colorado's population) died. [Flash a picture, found at the end of this lesson, of 30 men several times.] Even Hophni and Phinehas, sons of Eli the priest, were slain.

Do you remember the prophecy of the man of God to Eli? “This is a sign that God will curse your family forever: both Hophni and Phinehas will die on the same day” (1 Samuel 2:34). God had promised it; now it happened.

It was a horrifying thing that 30,000 men were slain, but worse than that was the fact that the Philistines had captured the ark of the covenant, the place where God met with His people! What would happen to the ark? What would happen to Israel?

Lessons from this lesson:

- We see Jesus:
(Nothing in this story.)

Activities:

- Play dough: sword, helmet
- Snack: Cheez-it[®] crackers (for the box) and Goldfish[®] crackers (for the seraphim above) to picture the ark of the covenant.
- Have students arrange flannelgraph figures as they retell the story.
- Place tabernacle furniture correctly on a tabernacle chart. (See Lesson 12.19 Tabernacle for a visual aid.)
- Discuss the “lucky” items shown below, telling why it is wrong to trust in such things. What power does a rabbit's foot, a special cap, a lucky bat, a horse shoe, a wishbone, a four-leafed clover, the number 7, or a lady bug have? None. We must learn to trust God in our ball games, *etc.*, no matter how they turn out. God is in charge of life, not lucky items.
- Review questions: (Game: Print the sheet with “lucky charm” pictures found below. For every correct answer, a student will write a big black X over one of the “lucky” items.)
 1. When the Philistines slew 4000 soldiers of Israel, what did Israel think they should do? [Take the ark of the covenant into battle.]
 2. Who carried the ark of the covenant into battle? [Hophni and Phinehas, the priests.]
 3. What did all the soldiers of Israel do when the ark of the covenant came into the camp? [Gave a mighty shout.]
 4. What did the Philistines think when they heard the shout and learned the ark of the covenant was in Israel's camp? [That they would surely be defeated by this mighty God.]
 5. What event in Israel's history did the Philistines think about that showed God's great might? [God's plaguing all the Egyptians.]
 6. Who won the second battle? [The Philistines.]
 7. Thirty thousand of Israel were slain in the battle. What did the rest of the soldiers do? [Ran away.]
 8. What tragic thing happened at this battle? What did the Philistines take? [The ark of the covenant.]

Memory Verse[s]:

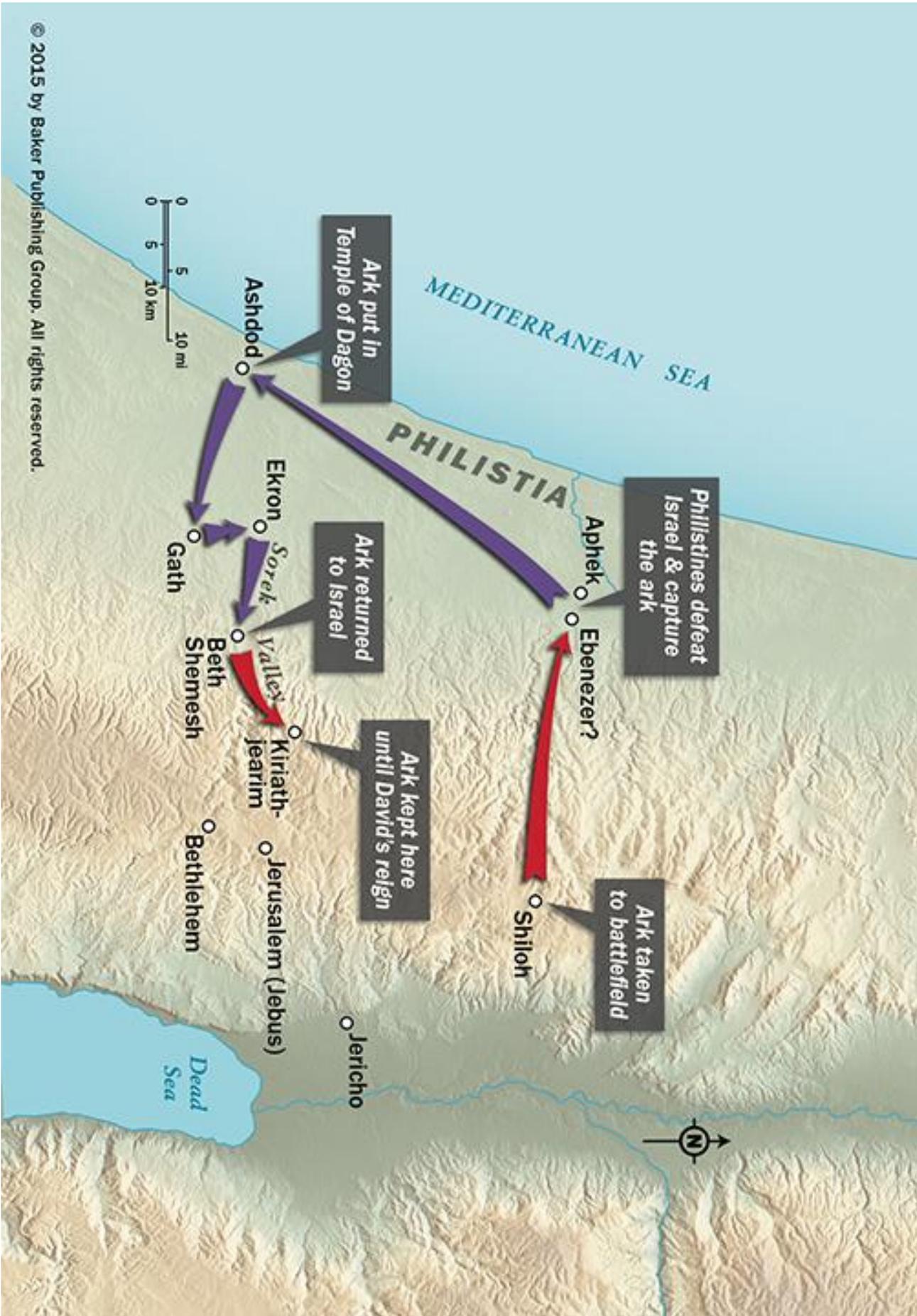
- 1 Samuel 2:30: [God said,] “Those that honor me I will honor, and those that despise me shall be lightly

esteemed.”

Handwork:

- Students will construct a model of the ark of the covenant. Templates and instructions are found at [Samuel « Crafting The Word Of God](#).

ark of the covenant



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