

5. Is our God a lucky charm?

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Rabbit's foot, four leaf clover, Virgin Mary statue on a car dashboard, American Indian dream catcher, Hamsa hand, Saint Joseph statue upside down in the front of your house to sell it fast, rosary, and crucifix. What do they have in common to many spiritually ignorant people? They are all considered as lucky charms. The purpose of these items is to bring good luck, good health, fortune, or whatever good things to our lives.

The actual original definition of "charm" is coming from "casting a spell to one." In other words, these items are supposed to cast spells onto the messy situations we are in, so that they could turn the situation into something better for us. That means that if we rely on these lucky charms, we are considering these as idols which, in reality, is demonic worship.

This evening we find the Israelis face a formidable foe, the Philistines at the battle line. They wanted to defeat the Philistines, so they were going to rely on a lucky charm over their God.

A. BRINGING THE ULTIMATE LUCKY CHARM

1 Samuel 4:1-3 And the word of Samuel came to all Israel. Now Israel went out to battle against the Philistines, and encamped beside Ebenezer; and the Philistines encamped in Aphek. 2 Then the Philistines put themselves in battle array against Israel. And when they joined battle, Israel was defeated by the Philistines, who killed about four thousand men of the army in the field. 3 And when the people had come into 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 from Shiloh to us, that when it comes among us it may save us from the hand of our enemies."

Please give me your interpretation of this portion..

What is the difference between Philistines and Palestines?

About 1500 years separated and two of them are not even remotely connected. The Philistines were Greek and they were defeated and expelled from Israel eventually. In AD 135 the Romans renamed Israel to Palestina. In 1964 the Arabs hijacked the name "Palestine" and "Palestinians" at the instigation of the KGB of the Soviet Russia.

In v3, the Israelis were asking, "Why has the Lord defeated us today before the Philistine?" With that question in mind, please answer me this: Why do bad things happen to good people? Why are there so many evil things in this world? Does this mean that God cannot handle the affairs happening on earth?

The question of the Jews is a wrong question to ask. They should have examined themselves why God allowed them to be defeated.

How often do we blame God for bad things that happen to us even though we are the ones who caused all that havoc?

Israel lost 4,000 men in the first battle, and this should have been a good clue to them that God was displeased. Did they repent and turn to God in prayer and con-

fession? No! Instead, they resorted to superstition and took the ark of the covenant to the battlefield. They were acting by chance, not by faith. Because the ark had gone before the nation in the wilderness and had marched in victory around Jericho, they thought its mere presence would assure them victory over the Philistines. Instead of revering the ark as the symbol of God's presence, they turned it into a religious lucky charm.

The ark of the covenant represented Jehovah God, the central person in all of Israel's history. The ark was the most important piece of furniture in the tabernacle and resided in the Holy of Holies. In the ark there were the two tablets of the law, a golden bowl that contained the manna, and Aaron's rod. And on it was the golden "mercy seat" where God's glorious presence dwelt. This was the earthly throne of God from which He spoke to His people according to Exodus 25.

The Israelis were not considering that it was the Lord who saved their ancestors from the hands of the Egyptians. Instead of considering the ark of the covenant as the point of contact of their faith in God, they'd rather rely on a golden box that is nothing more than a box without God.

If we have cross necklaces on our necks or crucifixes on our car dashboards without God in our hearts, they are nothing.

Elvis Presley wore a cross, a star of David, and the Chinese letter "Chi." He explained his jewelry choices as follows: "I don't want to miss out on heaven due to a technicality."

The issue should not be how many crucifixes we have around us, the real issue is how much the meaning of Jesus' death on the cross goes through our hearts.

B. THEIR LUCKY CHARM DIDN'T WORK

1 Samuel 4:4-11 So the people sent to Shiloh, that they might bring from there the ark of the covenant of the Lord of hosts, who dwells between the cherubim. And the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were there with the ark of the covenant of God. 5 And when the ark of the covenant of the Lord came into the camp, all Israel shouted so loudly that the earth shook. 6 Now when the Philistines heard the noise of the shout, they said, "What does the sound of this great shout in the camp of the Hebrews mean?" Then they understood that the ark of the Lord had come into the camp. 7 So the Philistines were afraid, for they said, "God has come into the camp!" And they said, "Woe to us! For such a thing has never happened before. 8 Woe to us! Who will deliver us from the hand of these mighty gods? These are the gods who struck the Egyptians with all the plagues in the wilderness. 9 Be strong and conduct yourselves like men, you Philistines, that you do not become servants of the Hebrews, as they have been to you. Conduct yourselves like men, and fight!" 10 So the Philistines fought, and Israel was defeated, and every man fled to his tent. There was a very great slaughter, and there fell of Israel thirty thousand foot soldiers. 11 Also the ark of God was captured; and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, died.

What is your interpretation of this portion of the Scripture?

How could the Philistines win over the Israelis who had the ark of the covenant?

The Philistines were first afraid, then determined that they were going to behave like brave soldiers. Since God had forsaken His people, the Philistines had an easy victory. This is a vivid description of a tragedy. Hophni and Phinehas were ungodly priests and their presence brought judgment, not blessing.

We, human, can get a false sense of security through religion. This could have been an ultimate praise gathering program. I said "program", not intimate relationship with God Himself. All the hooplas and cheers went on and people jumping up and down with excitement. Then what? Did they hear God or did they obey God? The true worship of our God does not show itself while we sing songs to Him, rather while we live for Him in obedience in everyday good or bad.

V8 says, "*these mighty gods.*" The Philistines were polytheists. They assumed that the Israelites also had many gods like them.

The enemy of God, satan is not afraid of people's religions. As a matter of facts, he encourages them to get into religion, not the relationship with Jesus. He knows that the more religious people are, the more ignorant they would be of the truth of God.

God didn't bless Israel's superstitious belief in the power of the ark instead of the power of God. We often make the same mistake the Israelites made. We assume that whatever we do as Christians is God anointed and initiated. It is not so. Our own effort without God's anointing always winds up in more trouble and mockeries from our enemies and unbelievers.

But if we walk in His Spirit and do the things in the way He wants, we can count on Him every time.

1 John 5:14-15 this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him.

The Israelites thought the ark would deliver them from defeat, but they were not only defeated, but also the ark was captured. They made it into an idol, God allowed them to lose their idol. It is the same in our lives. As children of God, if we seek anything or anyone else other than God, it is nothing more than an idol. God will not put up with sharing our hearts with anyone or anything else. He will take away the idol, whether it is our money, jobs, or even the ministry for the Lord. Can a ministry for the Lord be an idol? Yes, if it starts to take over the position of God in our hearts.

Since the first warning by the unnamed prophet, God who has tremendous mercy gave so much time for these two sons of Eli to repent from their wicked ways, but they didn't.

C. THE GOD'S JUDGEMENT UPON ELI'S FAMILY

1 Samuel 4:12-18 Then a man of Benjamin ran from the battle line the same day, and came to Shiloh with his clothes torn and dirt on his head. 13 Now when he came, there was Eli, sitting on a seat by the wayside watching, for his heart trembled for the ark of God. And when the man came into the city and told it, all the city cried out. 14 When Eli heard the noise of the outcry, he said, "What does the sound of this tumult mean?" And the man came

quickly and told Eli. 15 Eli was ninety-eight years old, and his eyes were so dim that he could not see. 16 Then the man said to Eli, "I am he who came from the battle. And I fled today from the battle line." And he said, "What happened, my son?" 17 So the messenger answered and said, "Israel has fled before the Philistines, and there has been a great slaughter among the people. Also your two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, are dead; and the ark of God has been captured." 18 Then it happened, when he made mention of the ark of God, that Eli fell off the seat backward by the side of the gate; and his neck was broken and he died, for the man was old and heavy. And he had judged Israel forty years.

What is your interpretation?

Why is Eli so nervous?

Eli knew that his sons had entered the Holy of Holies which was wrong and taken the ark to the battlefield. But he didn't stop them, just as he had chosen not to control them in past years. He wasn't worrying about his sons as he sat in his special seat by the tabernacle door. He was trembling for the safety of the ark of God. But didn't Eli realize that God was still on the heavenly throne even if His earthly throne had been cheapened and transformed into a good-luck charm? Wasn't the Lord able to protect His own furniture and His own glory?

As Eli hears the commotion in the city regarding the loss of the battle, the two dead priests, and the ark, he asks for information. And the messenger tells him the story of bad to worse to worser (great English, eh?) to worst:

Bad – *Israel has fled before the Philistines.*

Worse – *There has been a great slaughter among the people*

Worser – *Also your two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, are dead.*

Worst – *And the ark of God has been captured.*

The death of Eli and his two sons was the beginning of the fulfillment of God's prophecy that Eli's branch of the priesthood would be destroyed and a new line introduced.

God had promised that Eli's two sons were to die on the same day as a sign of judgment on the house of Eli in chapter 2. God had not announced the promise that Eli would also die the same day. God tells us much in prophecy, but not everything. Some of it is only seen in its fullness after it has already happened.

D. MORE TRAGEDY

1 Samuel 4:19-22 Now his daughter-in-law, Phinehas' wife, was with child, due to be delivered; and when she heard the news that the ark of God was captured, and that her father-in-law and her husband were dead, she bowed herself and gave birth, for her labor pains came upon her. 20 And about the time of her death the women who stood by her said to her, "Do not fear, for you have borne a son." But she did not answer, nor did she regard it. 21 Then she named the child Ichabod, saying, "The glory has departed from Israel!" because the ark of God had been captured and because of her father-in-law and her husband. 22 And she said, "The glory has departed from Israel, for the ark of God has been captured."

And your interpretation is?

the capture of the ark of the covenant all at once. The wife of Phinehas had more spiritual insight to know that the glory of God has departed than her father-in-law, her husband, and her brother-in-law.

The glory of the Lord is not residing on the ark element itself. We have to stop thinking God in our size and our realm. He has infinite wisdom and He measures the universe with a span of His hand.

Tragically, the same could be said of many churches, many ministries, and many individual Christian lives, nowadays. The glory of God has departed from them. They are still pastors, there are still churches, but God is not enthroned in glory among them. There is the form of godliness, without the power. We can write "Ichabod" across many churches, many ministries, and many individual Christian lives.

The Scripture said that the glory of God has departed from Israel. Can you tell me when it came back to them?

When King Solomon dedicated the temple, the glory of God returned according to 1 Kings 8:10. But before the destruction of Jerusalem, the prophet Ezekiel saw the glory leave the temple and the city in Ezekiel 8, 9, 10, and 11.

Where is it now?

Ezekiel also saw the future millennial temple and the return of the glory of God according to Ezekiel 43. The glory of God didn't return to this earth until the birth of Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world in Luke 2. Today, God's glory dwells in His people individually and in His church collectively.

E. APPLICATIONS

1) We should not put our trust on lucky charms, but God.

It doesn't matter what kind of forms or previous results to others "lucky charm" may bring. God is the only One we must trust and follow.

2) God's judgement may not happen instantly, but it does a complete job as God promises.

We don't want to go against God. When we know that we did the wrong things, it is better to come to God and repent and turn away from our sins fast. Because His millstone may not go around fast, but it grinds exceedingly fine.

3) God will turn tragedy into triumph to bring glory to Himself.

Many circumstances we regard as a calamity, God uses them in a marvelous way to glorify Himself. Our situation may be terrible and beyond reach and repair. Let's not lose our trust in God, because He can take care of the situations much better than we can and He will.