

**Introduction:** When I was ten years old I knew that baseball had become a big idol in my life. It started in the October I was in second grade. One sunny day as our class was getting ready to go home at three o'clock many of my friends were in an animated discussion. When I asked, I was told it was the seventh game of the 1960 baseball World Series between the Pirates and Yankees. Up until then I thought baseball was a game only kids played. Who knew grown-ups also played baseball and it was a big deal? My friends seemed to be supporting the Yankees. My childhood sweetheart was born in Pittsburgh and wanted the Pirates, so I said I would support her and them. My friends ganged up on me, so I tentatively went with the Yankees. When I got home I realized my mother was listening to the game on the radio. When I said I hoped the Yankees would win, I got a two minute talk that our family was for the Boston Red Sox and we always wanted the Yankees to lose. I decided to go with both my Mom and my sweetheart. In the top of the ninth inning Mom went outside to weed. The Yankees tied the game at nine to nine. Then came one of the most dramatic moments in World Series history: light-hitting second baseman Bill Mazeroski led off the bottom of the ninth inning with a home run and Pittsburgh won 10-9! I ran out to tell my mother everything that happened. I had trouble pronouncing the hero's name, but it was a moment we bonded over baseball. \*\*\* By 1963 I knew five hundred big-league players on the twenty teams. Every spring I read *Street and Smith's Baseball Yearbook* and the pre-season issue of *Baseball Digest*. Every Sunday after church I read all the fine print stats for both leagues after Friday's games. And I memorized the full line for all my favorite players. \*\*\* One Sunday I confessed to Mrs. Rennie, my Sunday school teacher, that baseball was a big idol in my life. The next week she handed me an article from the Fellowship of Christian Athletes magazine about Bobby Richardson the MVP of the 1960 World Series. It told how he loved baseball and he was a dedicated Christian. The next Sunday I told her I was happy for Bobby, but I knew myself, and baseball was a dangerous idol for me! \*\*\* She gave me reassuring words. But I felt misunderstood and let her words drop and had great disappointment in my heart because she did not take my confession seriously. I still wonder why some adults do not take the words of ten year old children seriously enough. Especially because idolatry is such an important subject! \*\*\* John Calvin said the human heart is an idol factory. The history of the people of Israel is all about their ongoing descent into idolatry for over fifteen centuries. \*\*\* We are now ready to discover the truths God wants us to apply in our lives from the passages we heard.

**I. After the Philistines kill four thousand Israelites they return with the Ark of The Covenant and the Philistines fear the God who overpowered Egypt; but, they kill thirty thousand more Israelites, take the Ark and kill Eli's sons. (1 Samuel 4:1-11)**

- A. After the Philistines kill four thousand Israelites, the Israelites decide to bring The Ark of where The Lord of Hosts sits with them into the battle. (*Verses 1-4*)
1. Samuel spoke God's words to Israel, they went to battle the Philistines and four thousand Israelites died, so the elders asked why their Covenant God Yahweh defeated them. (*Verses 1-3a*)  
**Good question:** This is a good question. When Achan sinned before a battle 'only' thirty-six Israelites died (Joshua 7). Four thousand is a huge number. God had told Moses that if they refrained from idolatry one hundred of them would chase ten thousand enemies (Leviticus 26:1-13). Why then this?
  2. So they decide to take the Ark of the Covenant of Yahweh of hosts to battle with them because He dwelt between the cherubs on the cover of the Ark; and, Eli's two sons were with them. (*Verses 3b-4*)  
**Presumption:** They are acting on the presumption Yahweh must be with them by His Ark regardless if they are living in obedient faith to Him or in rebellion against the instructions He gave them.  
**Sons of Eli:** Elis' sons were acting wickedly, stealing meat for themselves from the sacred offerings of God's people and having illicit sex with women just outside God's Tabernacle (1 Samuel 2:12-17, 22).
- B. The Philistines fear the God who overpowered the Egyptians, but they resolve to be men of war; they kill thirty thousand more Israelites, take the Ark and kill Eli's sons. (*Verses 5-11*)
1. When the Ark entered the soldier's camp they gave a great war-cry. (*Verse 5*)  
**Reaction of Israelites:** They believed God was now with them and they would win the next battle.
  2. The Philistines questioned the war-cry until they understood the Ark of Yahweh was now with their enemies; they were greatly afraid because this was a new experience for them; and, because they heard what happened in Egypt and wondered if they would be delivered from His hand. (*Verses 6-8*)  
**Pagan reaction:** The Philistines lived in five cities near the Mediterranean Sea in southern Judah: Gaza, Ashkelon, Ashdod, Ekron and Gath. Gaza is fifteen miles from the Mediterranean Sea. Gath is fifteen miles from the Dead Sea. The battle is taking place thirty miles north of the northernmost city.  
These pagan people had more reverential fear of Yahweh than the Israelites!
  3. The Philistines encourage each other to fight like men so they will not have to serve the Hebrews, they fought and Israel was struck down, thirty thousand Israelites fell (in death). (*Verses 9-10*)  
**Pagan resolution:** These pagans gave each other a pep talk and resolved to fight for their freedom.  
**Slaughter:** Incredibly, they killed an additional thirty thousand Israelites!  
Apparently the Presence of The Covenant God in His Ark made no difference?
  4. The Ark of God was taken (by the Philistines) and Eli's sons were killed. (*Verse 11*)  
**Ark taken:** How was God's Ark taken by pagan enemies? The book of Judges gives us a clue. They failed to wipe out all the idolatrous people living in the land before them. The angel of Yahweh told them because they disobeyed Him, the gods of the pagans would be a snare to them (2:1-3). The last line of the book said all the people did what was right in their own eyes (not Yahweh's, 21:25)

**Idolatry by God's people drives Him away**

**Eli's sons:** Yahweh's last word to Eli was that his sons would die (1 Samuel 2:34-36).

**II. When Eli hears the news, he dies; as his daughter-in-law dies giving birth she calls her son 'No Glory' because God's Glory has departed; four hundred years earlier, God parted a flood-stage Jordan River for the generation raised with God in the wilderness. (1 Samuel 4: 17-22; Joshua 4:15-18)**

A. When Eli hears the news he falls backward, breaks his neck and dies. (1 Samuel 4: 17-18)

1. A man brings news to Eli that Israel fled from the Philistines, there was a great slaughter of people, also Eli's two sons are dead, and the Ark of God is taken. (Verse 17)

**Report to Eli:** The messenger from the battle front told Eli of four devastating things.

2. When he mentioned the Ark of God, Eli fell backward from his (judging) seat next to the (city) gate, his neck was broken and he died because he was old and heavy; he judged Israel forty years. (Verse 18)

**Ark:** Only when he heard the Ark was taken was Eli overwhelmed. He honored his sons more than Yahweh (1 Samuel 2:27), but when he realized this caused God's Presence to be lost Eli died.

**Homiletical Idea: Idolatry by God's people drives Him away. (#2)**

B. As Eli's daughter-in-law dies giving birth she names her son 'No Glory', saying the glory has departed from Israel. (1 Samuel 4: 19-22)

1. It was her time to bear when Phinehas' pregnant wife heard the Ark of God was taken and her father-in-law and husband were dead; she bowed over in distress because pain overtook her. (1 Samuel 4: 19)

**Pregnant daughter-in-law:** The worst time for a woman to hear God's Presence was gone and the men in her life are dead is when she is delivering her baby.

2. As she died, the women with her told her not to fear because she had given birth to a son; but, she did not answer or pay attention; she called the child Ichabod, saying: the glory has departed from Israel because the Ark of God was taken and because of her father-in-law and husband. (1 Samuel 4: 20-21)

**Died delivering son:** As she was dying, the midwives tried to encourage her. She had none of it.

**Her son's name:** She responded by naming her son 'No Glory' just before she died.

3. She said: The glory has departed from Israel for the Ark of God has been captured. (1 Samuel 4: 22)

**Her exclamation point:** In this her heart was right: God has left Israel! It started when the Israelites failed to drive out all the original occupants of the land and were corrupted by their idolatry. They lacked the child-like clarity of a ten year old who knew in his heart baseball was an idol for him.

**Application:** We must be motivated to examine our own hearts for any idols. Then we must join with fellow believers in Jesus concerning all the idolatry in His Church, e.g. nationalism, so we will repent and remove all our idols so God's Glory will not depart from us.

**Idolatry by God's people drives Him away**

C. Under Joshua, when the priests carrying the Ark of the Covenant of Yahweh put their feet in the edge of the Jordan River it ceased to flow (Joshua 3:15-17) until all had passed over. (Joshua 4:15-18)

1. Yahweh said to Joshua: Command the priests carrying the Ark of the Testimony, and they will come up from the Jordan; then Joshua commanded the priests: Y'all must come up from the Jordan. (Joshua 4:15-17)

**Background:** The people who crossed the Jordan were the children raised in the wilderness over the last forty years. They were all under age sixty because everyone over age twenty died in the wilderness (Numbers 32:10-13).

2. Then the priests came up bearing the Ark of the Covenant of Yahweh from the midst of the Jordan; the soles of the feet of the priests were lifted up on dry ground; then the waters of the Jordan returned to their place and they overflowed as before over all its banks.. (Joshua 4:18)

**Safely over:** They crossed the Jordan River in its springtime flood stage. Those who survived forty years isolated with God alone had a special close relationship with Him as there were no direct idolatrous influences on them. Their parents had taught them to love Yahweh their God above everything and everyone (Deuteronomy 6:4-7).

**Application:** We must all learn from the wilderness generation so we will decide to leave behind any idolatrous influences in our lives, even to the point of embracing our 'wilderness' experiences, to be drawn closer to the God of salvation.

**Yahweh shows His Glory to those who wholeheartedly love Him**

**Gospel:** .It is impossible for us to overcome idolatry and fully love God in our own strength. \*\*\* But God has provided a way for people to succeed in purging idolatry from their lives. Because of His strong Life-giving, Life-changing LOVE for fallen idolatrous people He sent His Son, Jesus THE Savior, to die in our place, and then to rise from the dead so we may share in His New Life. \*\*\* Through humble, dependent child-like faith IN Him and what He did for all people: from ten-year old boys; to powerful people who plunder the poor; to hateful people who victimize the weak with violent acts – all may overcome their love: of good things more than God; riches more than The Redeemer; and, murder more than The Messiah. \*\*\* IN Jesus we can love God and remain in His Glorious Presence forever!

**Idolatry by God's people drives Him away**