EBENEZER WARS, EPISODE 2
1 Samuel 7

God's people were at war.
—afflicted by the Philistines, because of sin, idolatry, and corruption.
To free themselves from the enemy, God's people went to war.
Battles could be called the "Ebenezer Wars"—where Israel set up camp.
At the time they camped there it was just an empty field.
Significance comes from what happened there *during* the wars.

EPISODE 1 1 Sam 4:1-11 [1st episode contains] **2 SERIOUS WARNINGS:**

1. The danger of <u>seeking to please yourself</u>—seen in previous chapters.

What did they do?

Eli's sons—leaders of God's people—were living for self.
God called them to live for Him and serve Him.
They were living for their own pleasure.
They wanted to "enjoy the good life"

People did what <u>seemed right in their own eyes.</u>

God's people were imitating the example of their leaders.
They were living to please themselves.

People decided right and wrong based on <u>their personal tastes and preferences.</u>

Everyone wanted things <u>*their* way.</u>

Having it *MY* way doesn't accomplish God's purposes.
Doing what "**I** want" won't produce supernatural results.

What was the result? <u>4:1-2</u> *And Samuel's word came to all Israel. Now the Israelites went out to fight against the Philistines. The Israelites camped at Ebenezer, and the Philistines at Aphek. 2 The Philistines deployed their forces to meet Israel, and as the battle spread, Israel was defeated by the Philistines, who killed about four thousand of them on the battlefield.*

They went out to fight the enemy—and were destroyed.
They lost 4000 men! Attendance was down the next Sunday!
—So was giving!

[When they got together to evaluate what went wrong, they realized what the problem was: *they had departed from the way they had always done things.*
When God used to bless their ministry, the ark went in front of them.
If they go back and get the ark, they'll win again —introduces <u>2nd danger</u>:]

2. The danger of <u>trusting tradition</u> <u>4:3-8</u> *When the soldiers returned to camp, the elders of Israel asked,* ***"Why did the LORD bring defeat upon us today before the Philistines? Let us bring the ark of the LORD's covenant from Shiloh, so that it may go with us and save us from the hand of our enemies."*** *4 So the people sent men to Shiloh, and they brought back the ark of the covenant of the LORD Almighty, who is enthroned between the cherubim. And Eli's two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, were there with*

the ark of the covenant of God. 5 When the ark of the LORD's covenant came into the camp, all Israel raised such a great shout that the ground shook. 6 Hearing the uproar, the Philistines asked, "What's all this shouting in the Hebrew camp?" When they learned that the ark of the LORD had come into the camp, 7 the Philistines were afraid. "A god has come into the camp," they said. "We're in trouble! Nothing like this has happened before. 8 Woe to us! Who will deliver us from the hand of these mighty gods? They are the gods who struck the Egyptians with all kinds of plagues in the desert.

What did they do?

They decided to <u>repeat what always worked before</u>

They would take the ark with them into battle.

"IT will save us from the hand of our enemies."

Even the Philistines realized what a great strategy this was!

The Israelites were excited!—there was a huge uproar in the camp.

The Philistines were terrified! *v.7 "We're in trouble! Nothing like this has happened before! Woe to us! Who will deliver us from the hand of these mighty gods. They are the gods who struck the Egyptians"*

What was the result?

They went out to fight the enemy—and were destroyed again.

<u>4:10-11</u> *So the Philistines fought, and the Israelites were defeated and every man fled to his tent. The slaughter was very great; Israel lost thirty thousand foot soldiers. 11 The ark of God was captured, and Eli's two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, died.*

This time they lost 30,000 men!

The ark was captured and their leaders were killed.

Attendance was down even more the next Sunday!—WAY down!

So was giving!

Now their leaders were gone too!

Doing what has <u>always worked</u> in the past

won't accomplish <u>supernatural results</u> in the present!

Throughout Israel's history:

Trying to duplicate their success often led to their failure!

The form couldn't guarantee success!

Moses striking the rock

It worked once—but the second time God said "*speak" to the rock!*

Israel's attack on Ai (after Jericho) Josh 7:1-13

They were so confident they would just take a couple of thousand men to fight—if they could beat Jericho, they could beat weak little Ai!

But there was sin in the camp!

Old approach won't work until they deal with sin!

<u>1 Sam 4</u> They were trusting in the ark of God, instead of in God of the ark!

There was nothing wrong with following the ark!
God gave them the ark! **God** told them to follow it at Jericho!
The problem: **They trusted in <u>the ark</u> instead of in <u>God</u>!**
They were clinging to *their* traditions, instead of in the God who Gave them those traditions.

TWO MISTAKEN NOTIONS:

1. They had a mistaken notion concerning <u>faith</u>.
They had faith, but their faith was in the wrong object.
It's not faith in faith that counts with God, but faith in Him
They placed their faith in the ark—it didn't work!

2. They had a mistaken notion concerning <u>success</u>.
If God was with them they would be successful. "Success" was their goal.
God's goal for His people isn't "success;" —it's faithfulness.
He wants us to trust Him—and remain faithful to Him—no matter what happens.

Eli's daughter-in-law issues final commentary, as she dies giving birth

<u>4:21</u> *She named the boy **Ichabod, saying, "The glory has departed from Israel"** —because of the capture of the ark of God and the deaths of her father-in-law and her husband.*

They've lost the war. The ark is gone. Their leaders are dead.
Most important, **the glory of God is gone.**
How discouraging! How negative! "I sure don't get much inspiration out of that message!"
What a downer! And they spent 20 years in that sad condition!

[But then you come to . . .]

EPISODE 2 1 Sam 7:1-13

They were defeated—they mourned—but their defeat motivated them to seek the Lord!

DEPENDENCE ON GOD LEADS TO VICTORY

<u>Ai</u>--after they obeyed God, they went up again and were victorious.
The people mourned and sought the Lord

<u>7:2</u> *It was a long time, twenty years in all, that the ark remained at Kiriath Jearim, and all the people of Israel mourned and sought after the LORD.*

They return to God and commit themselves to serve Him alone

<u>7:3a</u> *And Samuel said to the whole house of Israel, "If you are returning to the LORD with all your hearts, then rid yourselves of the foreign gods and the Ashtoreths and commit yourselves to the LORD and serve him only, and he will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines."*

God promises to deliver them **<u>7:3b</u>**
Key to success: ***"commit yourselves to the Lord and serve Him only, and <u>HE</u> will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines."***
The secret wasn't the ark; it was God Himself.

God is the one who would deliver them from the Philistines!

God was calling for total commitment to Him alone.

4 So the Israelites put away their Baals and Ashtoreths, and served the LORD only. 5 Then Samuel said, "Assemble all Israel at Mizpah and I will intercede with the LORD for you." 6 When they had assembled at Mizpah, they drew water and poured it out before the LORD. On that day ...

They fasted and confessed their sin **7:6** *"We have sinned against the Lord"*

God's spokesman cried out to the Lord on their behalf **7:7-9** *When the Philistines heard that Israel had assembled at Mizpah, the rulers of the Philistines came up to attack them. And when the Israelites heard of it,* ***they were afraid*** *because of the Philistines. 8 They said to Samuel,* ***"Do not stop crying out to the LORD our God for us, that HE may rescue us*** *from the hand of the Philistines." 9 Then Samuel took a suckling lamb and offered it up as a whole burnt offering to the LORD.* ***He cried out to the LORD on Israel's behalf, and the LORD answered him.***

What was the result? **7:10-11** *While Samuel was sacrificing the burnt offering, the Philistines drew near to engage Israel in battle. But that day* ***the LORD thundered with loud thunder against the Philistines and threw them into such a panic that they were routed before the Israelites.*** *11 The men of Israel rushed out of Mizpah and pursued the Philistines, slaughtering them along the way to a point below Beth Car.*

The Lord *thundered* against the Philistines.

Hannah's prayer for the birth of Samuel: ***2:9*** ***"It is not by strength*** *that one prevails; those who oppose the Lord will be shattered.* ***HE will thunder against them*** *from heaven..."*

It wasn't their strength, nor their traditions that would give victory.

Victory comes when *"the Lord thunders!"*

It's HIS power that gives His people victory!

Dependence on <u>the traditions of the past</u> never leads to victory.

Dependence on <u>God</u> leads to victory!

ROCK OF TESTIMONY—a reminder of what God has done

Gen 28:16-22 Jacob set up rock at place where God spoke to him, and called it "Bethel" => God's house.

Josh 4:20-24 Joshua set up 12 stones at Gilgal from the Jordan, as a reminder of what God did there

<u>1 Sam 6:18</u> When the ark was returned to Beth Shemesh *"... The large rock, on which they set the ark of the LORD, is a witness to this day in the field of Joshua of Beth Shemesh.*

<u>1 Sam 7:12</u> After their victory over the Philistines *"Then Samuel took a stone and set it up between Mizpah and Shen. He named it Ebenezer, saying, "Thus far has the LORD helped us."*

Samuel set up a memorial stone: *"Eben-ezer"* => <u>stone</u> of <u>help</u>

Samuel reminded the people: "Thus far <u>the Lord</u> has helped us!"

The stone was placed there as a perpetual reminder that <u>GOD is our help!</u> HE is the One who delivers—who helps in time of need.

WHAT LESSONS DOES GOD WANT US TO REMEMBER TODAY?

In their moment of crisis they called out to God and He heard their cry!

The beginning for that generation was marked by:

Confession => Cry to God for His power

Reaffirmation of commitment to God alone

=> Dedication of the memorial stone

We are convinced that we are at a critical moment of new beginning!

We've tried depending on the traditions of the past.

We've discovered that doesn't work

We want to reaffirm to God our commitment to Him alone—for Him to do whatever He wants to do in our midst!

This morning we want to dedicate our own memorial stone—to remind US of our total dependence on Him alone!

This was intended to be a *"Memorial Day"* observance—to establish our own *"memorial"* as a testimony that <u>*God*</u> is our Help!

The staff didn't think they should do this without me here to lead us in making this solemn affirmation of trust in the Lord as our Help.

=> Change My Heart, O God