

Being Properly Guided

What we need to beware of in order for the Lord to guide us

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The Israelites did not defeat the Philistines the first time. So they got the great and powerful Ark of the covenant and brought it to the battle field to ensure their victory. Surely the great and fearsome Philistines would not stand a chance against such immense Divine power. Did the Ark help the Israelites crush the Philistines? No. Not only did the Israelites lose a second time, but all of them who fought were killed. In addition, Hophni and Phinehas, the sons of Eli were both killed. And, the great and powerful Ark that belonged to the Israelites was then captured by the Philistines. How disappointing. How could this happen? Did the Lord not care for His people? Why didn't the Ark destroy the Philistines?

From the literal sense there are a few details that indicate some of the Israelite's mistakes, which is what led to their defeat. The first noticeable detail we can see comes from the ending verses of the preceding chapter where we read that "all Israel, from Dan to Beersheba, knew that Samuel was faithful as a prophet to Jehovah" (I Sam. 3: 20). Then the Israelites went into battle without approaching their leader first. It wasn't until much later after the Ark was returned that the Israelites came to Samuel for guidance. So it seems that the Israelites had disregarded him and felt they could handle things on their own.

Another mistake we see is that the Israelites did not pray to the Lord nor did they look to Him. The Lord was not in this event. Many times when the Israelites faced defeat and failed to

overcome the Philistines, they failed because they disregarded the Lord. They did not obey Him. One general rule: when the Lord is not called on or sought, bad things will happen.

One more important mistake is the manner in which the Israelites treated the Ark. The Ark had been used in the past during battle, as in the case with Joshua and his army circling the city Jericho with the Ark. But in that case, it was by command from the Lord. In *this* case, there was no such command. And so the Israelites took the Ark and brought it as though it were a secret weapon, that it would somehow magically wipe out the Philistines with its own power. Yet this was the mistake, they saw the Ark as having its own mystical power in itself without God. In a certain sense, they treated the Ark as an idol.

So they did not look up to their leader who had just been well established in Israel. Nor did they pray to the Lord. And, they mistreated the Ark. Not doing these things kept them disconnected from spiritual and heavenly things and from the Lord Himself. This is what went wrong.

Now what is it that we do that can keep us disconnected from spiritual and heavenly things and from the Lord Himself? One important thing to keep in mind as we think about this is that the Philistines are an enemy inside of each one of us. They were foreign to the Israelites, and they are foreign to us because they do not belong to the Lord, to heaven or to the church. To fight against the Philistines inside of us is a worthy battle, it's a battle against ourselves. We read that when the Israelites won a battle, it was on account of their following the Lord and obeying His precepts. But when the Philistines won a battle, it was on account of the Israelites turning away from the Lord and worshiping idols (AE 700:20). Philistines in the Word represent truth separated from good, or taking up false principles and arguing from them, or reasoning on

spiritual things from false thinking (AC 705). It's a very natural type of thinking, restricted to the senses of the body which persuade our understanding to believe what we hear and see in the world only. Such thinking can limit our ability to think spiritually, or think more internally so that we cannot think about God or heaven, at least not in spiritual terms. When we cannot think of the Lord or see things from a spiritual point of view, we are like the Israelites who turned away from the Lord and worshipped idols instead. Idols represent the falsities that spring up from natural, sensuous thinking, the type of thinking that comes from the love of the world and the love of self, also represented by the Philistines. So the Philistines here won the battle. The Israelites then were deprived of the Ark, they lost their connection with God.

Now how do we know that the Israelites lost due to their turning away from the Lord? Well, as it is suggested in the literal sense, in this battle the Israelites never looked up to their leader, Samuel. Samuel had just become well established throughout all the land. There wasn't anyone who didn't know him. He was their leader, someone they could look up to in times of trouble, or crisis, like a battle against the enemy. Before this event, Israel would always be delivered from their enemies whenever they approached their leader. But since they did not do this now, they couldn't be delivered.

Looking up to a leader in our case would be to look up to the truth, since truth is what instructs and guides us, as a leader does. There are many times in our lives when we learned something that profoundly affected us. We saw something that was true either by reading, hearing or experiencing something that enabled our minds inside to "click." Whatever it was that we learned at that moment stayed with us. It then became a new principle to live by. Above all, the truth we learn from the Word and what the Heavenly Doctrine teaches is what guides and leads our lives. The more we take in these truths into our understanding, the more we will be

guided by truth to do what is right and live good and useful lives. Doing this will keep us safe from those enemy Philistines, the part of us that chooses to think from the senses and not from a principle of truth.

In addition to looking up to truth as a leader, we look up to the Lord Himself. And it should go without saying that looking up to the truth in the first place is looking up to the Lord. The Israelites looked up to Samuel because he spoke to them on behalf of God. Samuel was their connection to the Lord. So in this story, if they didn't look up to their leader, they also didn't look up to the Lord. Looking to the Lord for us is to seek heavenly and spiritual things first as the Lord said in Matt. 6:33: "Seek ye first the Kingdom of God..." But above all, we seek a personal and unique relationship with the Lord who is the very Love and Life itself. It's our relationship with the Lord that brings us to angelic life. And the best way to enter this wonderful relationship with the Lord is by doing His commandments. It was this last part, doing the commandments, that the Israelites had failed to do. By not doing His commandments or precepts, they couldn't keep their end of the covenant or testimony, which was the only way they would be connected to the Lord. This same covenant exists with us. If there is ever a time when we are not living according to the commandments, or living according to the truth for that matter, then the Lord can't effectively reach us. As a result, spiritual things, and the Lord Himself will seem distant or lost. Yet it would be ourselves who have become distant and lost.

The Israelites had some serious consequences from the loss against the Philistines. As we saw before, they lost many men. Eli's sons were killed. And when Eli found out about all this, he fell backwards and broke his neck. Eli and his sons, represented the priesthood, which was also another means of connecting the Israelites with the Lord. They died, so that connection was also

lost. But there was one other loss that was the greatest of all, and that was the Ark being captured by the Philistines.

We've seen what the Philistines represent, that is restricting spiritual and heavenly things to natural and sensuous thought (AC 705). So them having the Ark is a picture of just that. What is worth noting now is how the Israelites had treated the Ark before it was captured. It isn't until I Sam. chapter 7 that Samuel told the Israelites to turn back to the Lord as well as put away their idols. How long had they had these idols? It is likely that they had them during the time of this battle in chapter 4. If they were actively worshiping idols, then there could be no way they would treat the Ark of the Covenant the way it was supposed to be treated.

The Ark was a reminder of the covenant the Israelites had between themselves and the Lord. Since they were actively turning away from the Lord, the covenant was broken and the Ark would no longer be able to serve as a reminder of this covenant. This way the Israelites would get a bunch of misinterpretations on the true power of the Ark. They brought it to battle, again without the direction and leadership from either Samuel or the Lord. They brought it thinking that it would be a sure way to victory. What did they think the Ark would do? Knock the Philistines down somehow? a miracle? Whatever the Israelites were expecting from the Ark, it was definitely against order since they had not turned to the Lord first.

Before we consider what the Ark means in our lives, let us take a look at this teaching from the Heavenly Doctrine:

Unless the internal of the Word flows in with those who read the Word and abide in the literal sense, no conjunction is effected of truth from the Word with good; and the internal of the Word flows in and is conjoined with good when the man esteems the Word holy; and he esteems it holy when he is in good. (AC 6789:2)

The important part of this teaching is where it says "when he is in good." Following the Lord, looking up to the truth in the Word and living according to the commandments would help us stay in good. If we are not doing these things, as in the case with the Israelites, then we would not be in good. And according to this teaching from the Heavenly Doctrine, it would be difficult to esteem the Word holy if we were not actively in good. How do people treat the Word when they are not in good?

Well, the Israelites thought that simply having the Ark with them would bring them success. A person who belongs to a church may believe that because he has a Bible, he is protected, even if he never opens it. There are those who belong to the New Church and have the false idea that because they are in the New Church, they are special or privileged. Or they may feel that they are different and unique from others because they have a set of the Writings at home, yet they have never actually read through them. He mistreats the Word when he says he belongs to a church, but by name only. On the other hand, those who read the Word reverently and turn to the Lord can use the Word for any reason, no matter how natural it is because whatever his problem may be, he is looking to the Lord and trying to do good.

When the battle was over, there was great mourning in Israel, we see this especially symbolized by the man of Benjamin who came running with his clothes torn and dust on his head. We read that this is specifically a symbol of mourning on account of there being no more truth and no more good (AC 4763:2). These were taken away, as the Philistines took away the Ark and killed off the priesthood with Eli's sons. Often times we feel grieved or distressed when we can no longer sense the things that come from the Lord, like we used to. And it's usually not until after we lose something that we realize how valuable it was to us. But rest assured, the Lord is always working to bring us closer to Him. If we ever wander off, or feel suppressed by the

heavy Philistine persuasions of our mind, the Lord is still working with us to make sure we can come back and receive His Word in its fullness. It happened to the Israelites in chapter 7 where they got the Ark back and they repented before the Lord. It can certainly happen to us too if we ever find ourselves in such a position.

So what can we learn from all this today? The Philistines had won the battle because the Israelites made themselves vulnerable. They were vulnerable by first not looking to their leader; we can be invulnerable if we think from a principle of truth. The Israelites were vulnerable because they did not pray to the Lord; we can make ourselves not vulnerable by praying to the Lord and actively trying to live a life of goodness. The Israelites became foolish and depended on the Ark for superstitiously; we can do well by reading the Word as long as we regard it as holy and from the Lord and not believe that simply possessing it will bring us victory. By making ourselves invulnerable these ways, we can be properly guided and live safely in the Lord by seeking first the kingdom of God.

Amen.

Lessons: Matt. 19: 16-24; I Sam. 4: 1-18; AC 4197:9; AE 701

AC 4197 [9] The precepts of the Decalogue were called the "testimony," because they were of the covenant, thus of the conjunction between the Lord and man; conjunction cannot come into existence unless man keeps the precepts, not only in external form, but also in internal... therefore it is good confirmed by truth, and truth derived from good, which is signified by the "testimony." Because this is so, the tables were also called the "tables of the covenant;" and the ark, the "ark of the covenant."

AE 701. As the ark is called "the ark of the covenant" it is also to be confirmed from the Word that it was called "the ark of the covenant" because the law was in it, and the "law," which in a broad sense means the Word, signifies the Lord in relation to Divine truth, which is the Word, thus Divine truth or the Word which is from the Lord and in which is the Lord; for all Divine truth proceeds from Him, and when this is received by man conjunction with the Lord is effected, and this conjunction is what is signified by "covenant."