

# If God is for Us

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Date: 21 June 2026

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[ 0 : 00 ] Please turn to Samuel chapter 4, 1 Samuel chapter 4. And then once you are there, I want you to turn one page before 1 Samuel chapter 4.

! I know I gave Amali chapter 4, but I want you to read from chapter 3, verse 19. Verse 19. And there he revealed himself to Samuel through his word. Chapter 4, verse 1. And Samuel's words came to all of Israel. Now the Israelites went out to fight against the Philistines. The Israelites camped at Ebenezer and the Philistines at Aphek. The Philistines deployed their forces to meet Israel. And as the battle spread, Israel was defeated. Defeated by the Philistines, who killed about 4,000 of them on the battlefield.

[ 1 : 31 ] When the soldiers returned to camp, the elders of Israel asked, why did the Lord bring defeat on us today before the Philistines?

Let us bring the ark of the Lord's covenant from Shiloh, so that he may go with us and save us from the hand of our enemies. So the people sent man 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, and Eli's two sons, Hophni and Phinehas.

They were there. They were there with the ark of the covenant of God. When the ark of the Lord's covenant came into the camp, all Israel raised such a great shout that the ground shook. Hearing the uproar, the Philistines asked, what's all the shouting in the Hebrew camp? When they learned that the ark of the Lord had come into the camp, the Philistines were afraid.

A god has come into the camp, they said. Oh no, nothing like this has happened before. We are doomed. Who will deliver us from the hand of these mighty gods? They are the same gods who struck the Egyptians with all kinds of plagues in the wilderness.

[ 2 : 56 ] Be strong. Be strong, Philistines. Be man. Or you will be subject to the Hebrews, as they have been to you. Be man and fight. So the Philistines fought.

And the Israelites were defeated. And every man fled to his tent. The slaughter, the slaughter was so great, it was so very great.

Israel lost 30,000 foot soldiers. The ark of the covenant of God was captured. And Eli's two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, died. That same day, Benjamin ran from the battle line and went to Shiloh. With his clothes torn and dust on his head. When he arrived, there was Eli sitting on his chair by the side of the road, watching. Because his heart feared for the ark of God.

When the man entered the town and told what had happened, the whole town sent up a cry. Eli heard the cry and asked, What is the meaning of this uproar?

[ 3 : 55 ] The man hurried over to Eli, who was 98 years old and whose eyes had failed so that he could not see. He told Eli, I have just come from the battle line.

I fled from it this very day. Eli asked him, What happened, What happened, my son? The man who brought the news replied, Israel fled before the Philistines. And the army has suffered heavy losses. And you also, your two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, they are dead. And the ark of God has been captured. When he mentioned the ark of God, Eli fell backward off his chair by the side of the gate. His neck was broken and he died. For he was an old man and was very heavy. He had led Israel for 40 years.

This is the word of the Lord. I think I'm supposed to pray at this point now, but it's okay. When you're the guest preacher, they say the syndrome you tend to have is you want to tell everybody everything because you don't know when you'll see them again.

[ 5 : 01 ] And so one of the things I do want to tell you and advise you and give you a tip on, which has worked with one or two of the students that we work with at our little church, is when you're doing your Bible studies, let's say you want to do your daily devotions and you just want to get away

of reading your Bible daily.

Okay, here's something you can do. I want you to just Google 1 Samuel and copy and paste onto a Word document or your notes on your phone, but then remove all the verse divisions and remove all the side bad things.

Just have it all together, squished up on one page or two pages, whatever. And then every day, every morning, when you read your Bible, you divide it into its chapters and verses.

And then you can compare with what your ESV has done with what your NIV has done. And the reason that thing is so cool, if you did that exercise, you would be forced to reckon with the fact that if verse 1, look at verse 1 of chapter 4.

If verse 1 is the beginning of this chapter 4. Verse 1 is the beginning of chapter 4. It would make it seem like Samuel, who in chapter 3 we've just been told, but God never let any of his words fall.

[ 6 : 25 ] It would make it seem like Samuel sanctioned this battle. Do you see that? It would make it seem like Samuel was the one who sanctioned this battle that blows up in their faces.

However, if you see that first part of verse 1 as the ending to chapter 3, then we are set up fittingly for what happens in the battle of chapter 4.

We're set up fittingly for the irony that chapter 4 unfolds. The irony is that at the end of chapter 3, we are told that the word of God goes from God to Samuel to all of the people.

And yet, in chapter 4, there is no mention of God. There is no consultation of Samuel.

There is no going to Samuel to find out what God is saying. We're talking as if this was a movie.

[ 7 : 49 ] It means that what you've just seen. English, seen and seen. S-W-E-N and S-C-E-N-E.

The scene that we have just seen in chapter 3 is the rise of Samuel. And now as the viewers, we're in chapter 4, and what you're watching is the scene of chapter 4 unfold.

They're fresh from defeat, and they go back to the camp to consult. They're consulting their elders.

And as the viewers, one of us, that annoying person who likes to talk while the movie is playing, is saying, as they watch chapter 4, go consult Samuel!

Go to Samuel! Go consult Samuel! Why are you not consulting Samuel? It's the cry you must have in your heart as you're reading chapter 4.

That's how chapter 3 and chapter 4 have been set up. You see, Mbutogaz, the crisis of this text is not first and foremost that the Israelites lose this battle against the Philistines.

[ 9 : 05 ] The crisis of the story is in this question that the author puts on their lips in their consultation in verse 3 when they say, so they come up to the camp, verse 3, when the people came to the camp, the elders of Israel said, why has the Lord defeated us today before the Philistines?

And so with the background of chapter 3, that the word of God came to Samuel and everyone in Israel from Dan to Beersheba, everyone knew, but it was Samuel who was the prophet of God. And so we know about, we've just seen the rise of Samuel.

We know that God is here. We know that they have the impression that God is back in their midst.

They know that God has been meeting with them through Samuel in the sanctuary.

They know that God is here amongst us in our midst. Bible quiz. When you walk into the sanctuary, it's not that God is in the sanctuary.

Where in the sanctuary is God? Don't answer. I'll answer it for you. In the sanctuary, God is in the Ark of the Covenant.

[ 10 : 17 ] Every time you see that term, it's very strange to us. Just think that's where God is. The Ark of the Covenant represents the presence of God.

And so they know that God is back. He's in the sanctuary. He's been meeting with Samuel. He's in our midst. And so they go and grab him.

They go and take him. And the text goes out of its way and says, Hophni and Phinehas, those unsaved, non-Christian, priests of God, they are there to take God with them to battle.

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. The crisis of this text is in conscripting God for our battles.

Christ of this text, John, is in co-opting God for our own agendas. Sure, we've just seen that he does not let his word to Samuel fail or fall to the ground.

[ 12 : 01 ] After all, that's what he's good for, right? That's what he does. That's his thing. That's what God is known for, striking down the Egyptians with every plague in the wilderness.

That's what God's do, right? He did it for our ancestors, he'll do it for us. Isn't that what divine things are for anyway?

Is that not the role of the guy upstairs who's looking over us all? I might have driven here, but Jesus, now you must take the wheel.

Why didn't he intervene? Why did God not intervene? Can you watch his job? What's he there for? Why didn't he intervene?

I don't get it. Why didn't he intervene? What's his job? What is he there for? I need you to, I need you to give me some good news.

[13:19] I need you to tell me that there's no way God would let this happen, right? There's no way God would let this happen, right? and the rest of this text is the painful resolution to this crisis it's a painful resolution to a crisis of a spirituality where God exists for me it is God displaying beyond the shadow of a doubt that he will not be used that he is God you are creature, he is creature and it's not the other way around he is creator, we are creatures we have been made for him, not him, for us

God does not exist to fight our battles God will not be co-opted into our life's agenda he will not take that wheel and the Israelites, they learnt this mercy painfully this is not some fictional story in the Bible to give us moral lessons this is real history real loss of life and destruction and wisdom wisdom is learning these lessons without having to go through them don't find out don't find out 1 Corinthians 10 says these things were recorded for our instruction and warning 2 Timothy 3.16 3.16 God's word is useful for teaching rebuking correcting and training in righteousness don't find out God will not be used God will not assume the position of the one who was created to serve you when it's supposed to be the other way around every single Sunday we do the call to worship because when we insist on wanting to worship God on our own terms it's this impulse at work why is your church so strict about how we do this thing because we worship God on his own terms when what is important about the worship of God is always filtered through the sieve of our own preferences you must know when it is this impulse at work when what is important about the worship of God in your life is only ever filtered through your preferences you must know but it's this impulse at work now there are very obvious things we can say that I think we can think about in terms of how this thing kind of works out

I think the most obvious one I hope it's obvious I'm trying to get the word obvious out of my vocabulary because often you say obviously and it's not obvious but it should be obvious that Lord's Day worship is important you must go to church on Sunday this thing of bringing this conversation of should we go to church on Sunday or not is this impulse at work yeah you know how it's like in the black family bro I grew up in the church we used to go to church all the time we had no choice but I'm older now I make it based on my preference is my sermon that bad Sean but I think there are more sophisticated ways that this impulse is at work in us I think I've been seeing it in our political takes especially on social media there's a hot controversy or something big happening in the country articles left right and center and then boom there's an article that's going to come up that says let me tell you this from the Christian perspective

I'll give you the Christian position but you're likely at the end of that article going to read somebody rubber stamping their own position with God's name co-opting God for your own agenda you see things like ah no real Christian would vote for this party or support this cause real Christians I love the language of this text it says they grabbed the Ark of the Covenant they grabbed God maybe closer to home you see this impulse in our relationships you could make lots of examples about friendships but here somebody treats their wife as lesser and justify that with the idea that God said she must submit

[19:32] I want to say to you this morning that one of the constant battles you and I will always be navigating as a Christian is a me-centered approach to life versus a God-centered approach to life a me-centered approach to life versus a God-centered approach to life I think the story in 1 Samuel I'm not doing this series with you I was doing it at our church the story in 1 Samuel 4 is not an isolated lesson on this it's what we see over and over again we study the book of Samuel I know that we've not been doing it but I know that you know the book I know that you remember the beginning of the book the story of Penina and Hannah Penina had the children and it looked like she had the covenant blessings of God and Hannah she couldn't have she couldn't have kids and she looked like she was cursed by God but in the story

God listens to Hannah and not Penina God has a relationship with Hannah and not Penina you see Penina's understanding of God is very transactional whereas Hannah knows I can go to the sanctuary where God is and I can talk to him and cry to him and he'll listen to me so as she called Samuel Samuel God has heard what Penina had to learn what he had to see as well as the viewers is that covenant relationship with God is not some ritual code for my success in life relationship with God is a marriage type like of relationship it's got to grow if you've been reading 1 Samuel if you know the story Hophni and Phinehas priests of God who are actually not even saved the whole argument is we were the promised pursuit we were the promised pursuit of God by birthright and yet when you get to chapter 3 it's Samuel who God is raising

God rejects if you like the formal priesthood and goes with Samuel who shows humility and an actual relationship with God and so although they were all in this covenant of God this covenant community of God it's very clear as you read 1 Samuel that that does not mean you have a license to live for your own pleasures to do your thing and bring God with you it is God who calls us to worship and into relationship with him and he's the one who sets out how that relationship is going to happen Jesus is going to say to the lady the Samaritan woman true worshipers will worship the father in spirit and in truth for they are the kind of worshippers that the father seeks there are true worshippers who worship in spirit and truth it's not about how it makes you feel it's more about what is true of him who calls you to worship him that's why we do the call to worship and then the creed he calls us to worship and he tells us spells out for us what it is and what this looks like what this relationship looks like and is based on and so here in chapter 4

Israel had the ark of the covenant which truly symbolizes the presence of God and yet God let it fall God let it be captured each of these episodes is making the point that God will not be managed God won't be slotted into our schedule God will not be manipulated can't bribe God God will not be made to exist to serve our personal agendas us I want to speak to the students a little bit here and I think even as I speak to them you'll get the point students you guys know how the prayer meeting is the most not isolated it's the wrong word is the least attended meeting in church right until exam season until exam sees the expectation there is

God must bless my plans without me ever genuinely seeking him the real question as you write exams even now is not so much will God help me pass tell me tell me he won't let me not pass right will God let me pass rather the question you should be asking is what is God doing in and through my life even through my studies and ambitions you hear the difference what is God doing in and through me in my life even through my studies and my ambitions in what way is the gospel of Jesus Christ crucified and raised the north star of how you think about your life ours is not to fit

[ 26 : 12 ] God into our lives it's not part of our routine the bible says in him we live and move and have our being you will not be tamed into our preferences and systems and as I close I hope you noticed the consequences in chapter four thousands of men die and it is a grave warning pun intended that when we co-opt God for our agendas we do invite judgment sometimes just you know the consequences of our own driving to wherever we are coming home to roost and in this particular story it's an overwhelming defeat for Israel and what crowns this defeat

I want you to think about it is the capture of the ark of the covenant of God the death of the priests including Eli at this point you might as well close the sanctuary God is so God there is no presence in the sanctuary there are no priests in the sanctuary for them at that time God is gone Ichabod but the beautiful thing that we see is that even though there is this judgment even though the consequences of the decisions are coming back home to roost although the priests are gone although the ark of the covenant is gone guess what is left Samuel

Samuel is left the one that God has raised and the rest of the book of Samuel Samuel will grow in stature and wisdom there will be Saul there will be David but even they too will die and the way God has left a Samuel for us is in Jesus Christ in the past God spoke through dreams and visions but in these last days he's spoken to us through his son Jesus Christ and even as you ask yourself the questions of is my life fitting God in or is my life within what God is doing your point of reference is not arbitrary oh God where are you your point of reference is Jesus if you go anywhere else other than

Jesus it's the same impulse at work here you're going to the elders you're going to the camp you're going everywhere else except for Jesus who God has raised up for us and what Jesus does for us is he dies in our place he dies for our sins including our co-opting of God and therefore gives us full and free access into the ultimate sanctuary where he himself is I want to say to you this morning

don't feel heavy go to Jesus do not conceptualize of your life and your spirituality with anything less than Jesus go to

Jesus let's pray Lord thank you for your word thank you that your word is useful for teaching rebuking correcting and training in righteousness thank you that you call us Lord and you invite us to worship you as sinful as we are that because of Christ you opened the way for us our prayer Lord is that you continue to guide us guard us that in glorifying you we too might be edified as your body do this oh Lord for your name's sake and for our benefit amen