

Story Time - Read the story to the children
Lesson 74: THE CAPTURE & RETURN OF THE ARK
I SAMUEL 4:1 THROUGH 7:2

(NOTE: This is a long story - you may want to stop halfway through and discuss some of the questions from the children's worksheet before continuing the story)

Samuel the prophet would speak to the whole nation of Israel. One day the Israelites went out to fight the Philistines. They set up camp near Ebenezer, and the Philistines camped at Aphek. The Philistines made a fierce attack. They defeated the Israelites and killed about four thousand of them. The Israelite army returned to their camp, and the leaders said, "Why did the LORD let us lose to the Philistines today? Let's get the sacred ark where the LORD's agreement with Israel is kept. Then the LORD will help us and rescue us from our enemies." The army sent some soldiers to bring back the sacred ark from Shiloh, because the LORD All-Powerful has his throne on the winged creatures on top of the ark. As Eli's two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, brought the ark into camp, the army cheered so loudly that the ground shook. The Philistines heard the noise and said, "What are those Hebrews shouting about?" When the Philistines learned that the sacred ark had been brought into the camp, they were scared to death and said: The gods have come into their camp. Now we're in real trouble! Nothing like this has ever happened to us before. We're in big trouble! Who can save us from these powerful gods? They're the same gods who made all those horrible things happen to the Egyptians in the desert. Philistines, be brave and fight hard! If you don't, those Hebrews will rule us, just as we've been ruling them. Fight and don't be afraid. The Philistines did fight. They killed thirty thousand Israelite soldiers, and all the rest ran off to their homes. Hophni and Phinehas were killed, and the sacred ark was captured. That same day a soldier from the tribe of Benjamin ran from the battlefield to Shiloh. He had torn his clothes and put dirt on his head to show his sorrow. He went into town and told the news about the battle, and everyone started crying. Eli was afraid that something might happen to the sacred ark. So he was sitting on his chair beside the road, just waiting. He was ninety-eight years old and blind, but he could hear everyone crying, and he asked, "What's all that noise?" The soldier hurried over and told Eli, "I escaped from the fighting today and ran here." "Young man, what happened?" Eli asked. "Israel ran away from the

Philistines," the soldier answered. "Many of our people were killed, including your two sons, Hophni and Phinehas. But worst of all, the sacred ark was captured." Eli was still sitting on a chair beside the wall of the town gate. And when the man said that the Philistines had taken the sacred ark, Eli fell backwards. He was a very heavy old man, and the fall broke his neck and killed him. He had been a leader of Israel for forty years. The wife of Phinehas was about to give birth. And soon after she heard that the sacred ark had been captured and that her husband and his father had died, her baby came. The birth was very hard, and she was dying. But the women taking care of her said, "Don't be afraid--it's a boy!" She didn't pay any attention to them. Instead she kept thinking about losing her husband and her father-in-law. So she said, "My son will be named Ichabod, because the glory of Israel left our country when the sacred ark was captured."

The Philistines took the sacred ark from near Ebenezer to the town of Ashdod. They brought it into the temple of their god Dagon and put it next to the statue of Dagon, which they worshiped. When the people of Ashdod got up early the next morning, they found the statue lying facedown on the floor in front of the sacred ark. They put the statue back where it belonged. But early the next morning, it had fallen over again and was lying facedown on the floor in front of the ark. The body of the statue was still in one piece, but its head and both hands had broken off and were lying on the stone floor in the doorway. The LORD caused a lot of trouble for the people of Ashdod and their neighbors. He made sores break out all over their bodies, and everyone was in a panic. Finally, they said, "The God of Israel did this. He is the one who caused all this trouble for us and our god Dagon. We've got to get rid of this ark."

7 & 8 YEAR-OLDS: *THIS IS A GOOD PLACE TO STOP AND DISCUSS QUESTIONS 1-10 ON THEIR WORKSHEET*

5 & 6 YEAR-OLDS: *THIS IS A GOOD PLACE TO STOP AND DISCUSS THE TRUE/FALSE QUESTIONS, AND QUESTIONS 1-6 ON THEIR WORKSHEET*

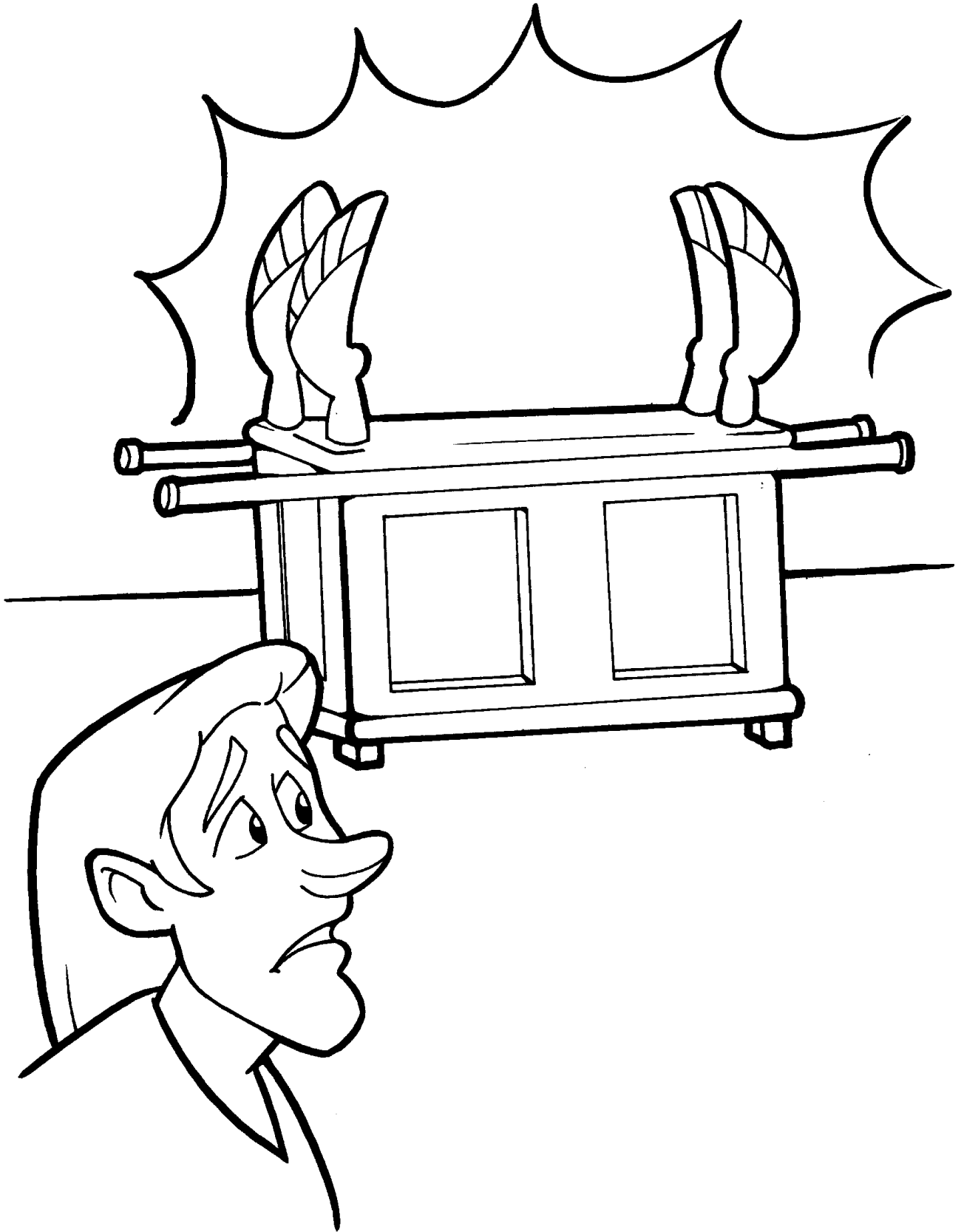
The people of Ashdod had all the Philistine rulers come to Ashdod, and they asked them, "What can we do with the sacred ark that belongs to the God of Israel?" "Send it to Gath," the rulers answered. But after they took it there, the LORD made sores break out on everyone in town. The people of Gath were frightened, so they sent the sacred ark to Ekron. But before they could take it through the town gates, the people of Ekron started screaming, "They've brought the sacred ark that belongs to the God of Israel! It will kill us and our families too!" The people of Ekron called for another meeting of the Philistine rulers and told them, "Send this ark back where it belongs. Then it won't kill us." Everyone was in a panic, because God was causing a lot of people to die, and those who had survived were suffering from all the sores they had on their bodies. They all cried to their gods for help.

After the sacred ark had been in Philistia for seven months, the Philistines called in their priests and fortunetellers, and asked, "What should we do with this sacred ark? Tell us how to send it back where it belongs!" "Don't send it back without a gift," the priests and fortunetellers answered. "Send along something to Israel's God to make up for taking the ark in the first place. Then you will be healed, and you will find out why the LORD was causing you so much trouble." "What should we send?" the Philistines asked. The priests and fortunetellers answered: There are five Philistine rulers, and they all have the same disease that you have. So make five gold models of the sores and five gold models of the rats that are wiping out your crops. If you honor the God of Israel with this gift, maybe he will stop causing trouble for you and your gods and your crops. Don't be like the Egyptians and their king. They were stubborn, but when Israel's God was finished with them, they had to let Israel go. Get a new cart and two cows that have young calves and that have never pulled a cart. Hitch the cows to the cart, but take the calves back to their barn. Then put the ark on the cart. Put the gold rats and sores into a bag and put it on the cart next to the ark. Then send it on its way. Watch to see if the ark goes on up the road to the Israelite town of Beth-Shemesh. If it goes back to its own country, you will know that it was the LORD who made us suffer so badly. But if the ark doesn't go back to its own country, then the LORD had nothing to do with the disease that hit us--it was simply bad luck. The Philistines followed their advice. They hitched up the two cows to the cart, but they kept their calves in a barn. Then they put the ark on the cart, along with the bag that had the gold rats and sores in it. The cows went straight up the road toward Beth-Shemesh, mooing

as they went. The Philistine rulers followed them until they got close to Beth-Shemesh. The people of Beth-Shemesh were harvesting their wheat in the valley. When they looked up and saw the ark, they were so happy that they stopped working and started celebrating. The cows left the road and pulled the cart into a field that belonged to Joshua from Beth-Shemesh, and they stopped beside a huge rock. Some men from the tribe of Levi were there. So they took the ark off the cart and placed it on the rock, and then they did the same thing with the bag of gold rats and sores. A few other people chopped up the cart and made a fire. They killed the cows and burned them as sacrifices to the LORD. After that, they offered more sacrifices. When the five rulers of the Philistines saw what had happened, they went back to Ekron that same day. That is how the Philistines sent gifts to the LORD to make up for taking the sacred ark. They sent five gold sores, one each for their towns of Ashdod, Gaza, Ashkelon, Gath, and Ekron. They also sent one gold rat for each walled town and for every village that the five Philistine rulers controlled. The huge stone where the Levites set the ark is still there in Joshua's field as a reminder of what happened. Some of the men of Beth-Shemesh looked inside the sacred ark, and the LORD God killed seventy of them because it was forbidden for anyone except the High Priest to look inside. This made the people of Beth-Shemesh very sad, and they started saying, "Who is able to stand before this holy LORD God? We'll have to send the ark away from here. But where can we send it?" They sent messengers to tell the people of Kiriath-Jearim, "The Philistines have sent back the sacred ark. Why don't you take it and keep it there with you?" The people of Kiriath-Jearim got the ark and took it to Abinadab's house, which was on a hill in their town. They chose his son Eleazar to take care of it, and it stayed there for twenty years. During this time everyone in Israel was very sad and begged the LORD for help.

74. THE CAPTURE & RETURN OF THE ARK

(I SAMUEL 4:1 THROUGH 7:2)



“ And when the people of Ashdod arose early on the morrow, behold, Dagon was fallen upon his face to the earth before the ark of the LORD. And they took Dagon, and set him in his place again.”

I SAMUEL 5:3

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MEMORY VERSE:

"And the men of Beth Shemesh said, 'Who is able to stand before this holy LORD God?' " **1 SAMUEL 6:20**

TRUE OR FALSE

1. Israel went out into battle with the Philistines. TRUE or FALSE
2. The Israelites won the battle against the Philistines and had a big party to celebrate." TRUE or FALSE
3. The Israelites decided to go and get the sacred ark of the LORD and bring it into battle with them so they could win." TRUE or FALSE
4. When the Israelites saw the ark coming into their camp, they shouted so loudly that the whole ground shook! TRUE or FALSE
5. When the Philistines heard them shouting, they were scared and ran away. TRUE or FALSE

ANSWER THE QUESTIONS

1. What happened when the Israelites fought the Philistines the second time? Did they win?
2. What happened to the sacred ark? Was it captured?
3. What happened to Eli's sons Hophni and Phineas? Did they die?
4. What happened to Eli when he heard that the ark was captured? Did he fall over out of his chair and die?
5. When the Philistines put the ark in the temple where their god Dagon was, what happened to Dagon's statue? Did it fall over? What happened to it the next night? Did its hands and head get broken off?
6. Then what happened to the people in every Philistine city and town where they brought the ark? Did the people get sick with sores on their bodies?
7. What did the Philistines want to do with the ark? Did they want to get rid of it? Were they scared of the ark?
8. What did they do with the ark? Did they put it on a cart with two cows pulling it? Do you remember where the cows took the ark? Was it to a town called Beth-Shemesh? Were the Israelites happy that the ark was back?
9. Did the people of Beth-Shemesh look inside the ark? What happened when they did? Why did the LORD kill 70 of their people? Was it because it was against God's law to look in it?

Lesson 74

This is what the Philistine god Dagon looked like.



PRAYER

Lead the children in a prayer of commitment to love the Lord with all of their heart, soul, and strength, and to obey Him in everything. If there are any children who have not yet responded to the Gospel, give them opportunity.