1 Samuel 4

“Superstition Ain’t The Way!”

I. INTRO:
A. In 1972, when Stevie Wonder was only 22, he wrote the hit song “Superstition”.
   1. The song deals with superstitions, & mentions several popular superstitious fables in its lyrics (Thirteen month old baby, broke the lookin’ glass/mirror - Seven years of bad luck, good things in your past). It’s chorus ended in, “Superstition Ain’t The Way!”

B. Many athletes have their own superstitions or good luck rituals.
   1. Michael Jordan (a graduate of North Carolina) used to always wear his blue North Carolina shorts under his Bulls uniform for good luck.
   2. Wade Boggs used to eat only chicken the day of a game & drew the Hebrew symbol “chai” that means "To Life" in the dirt before every at-bat.
   3. In baseball it’s bad luck to touch the baselines while running off and onto the field between innings.
   4. Fishing some spit on their bait before casting their rod to make fish bite. And no banana’s on board! (Dan!)

C. What might be silly in sports crosses a serious line in religion.
   1. Superstition = An unjustified belief in supernatural causation leading to certain consequences of an action or event.
   2. So to borrow from Stevie...“Superstition Ain’t The Way!”

D. OUTLINE: Defeat; Death; & Departure.

II. SUPERSTITION AIN’T THE WAY!
A. DEFEAT! (1-11)
B. 1ST DEFEAT! (1-9)
C. (1) The Philistines were a non-semitic people who had come from other parts of the Mediterranean world(Crete; Sea Peoples) to settle in the Promise Land in large numbers in the days of the Judges.
   1. They posed the single greatest military threat to Israel at the time.
D. (2) Israel was soundly defeated (4000 soldiers died).
   1. To avoid a repeat of this tragedy, the Israelites tried a new approach...they would be led into battle by their God.
2. This tactic had proved successful earlier in Israel’s history (Josh 6:6-21; Jericho).
   a) However, this time it failed miserably! (Why? Well, that’s what they ask in next verse)

E. (3) Great question...if only they had awaited the answer!
1. So, what was the right answer?
   a) The ark was the visible symbol of the Lord’s Glory (or manifested presence).
   b) So, why did the Israelites’ use of it prove ineffective? [It was used incorrectly!]
      (1) The leaders had not consulted the Lord to ascertain God’s will.
      (2) They didn’t ask as their Commander-in-chief (Yahweh of hosts) what strategy they should use.
         (a) Did they repent and turn to God in prayer and confession? No! Instead they resorted to superstition.
      (3) They appeared supremely confident in themselves.
      (4) Beware of using God to solve your problems if your life is not yielded to Him.
   c) A high degree of religious excitement is no guarantee of God’s favor or blessing.
      (1) Beware of a form of belief that confuses the symbol of faith with the real presence of God. It’s the natural result of the decay of religion.
   d) Instead of revering the ark as the symbol of God’s presence, they turned it into a religious relic! [Like in 2 Kings 18:4 where Moses’ serpent on pole became just that...Nehushtan!]

2. In what ways may Christians today make a similar mistake?
   a) Do we have any “Christian superstitions”? Oh I think we do!
      (1) Don’t some wear crosses as lucky charms?
      (2) Don’t some recite 3 magic words at the end of prayers to get their wish...“in Jesus name” [Yes, I know we are to ask in His name, but NOT as an Abracadabra, or an Alakazam!]
      (3) Jn.14:13 And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.
         (a) Which means asking according to Jesus’ will & mission.
         (b) God isn’t our cosmic piñata & in Jesus name isn’t the magic stick that whacks the piñata & all the goodies fall out of heaven.
F. (3-5) Eli’s 2 sons wanted God’s help but not God’s holiness.¹
   1. They wanted God in their crisis of life but not for their daily lives.
   2. They thought that the presence of the ark would assure victory, but their superstitious faith had no foundation.
   3. Lucky Rabbits foot: The full superstition regarding the luck of the rabbit's foot is quite complex. Not only must it be a real rabbit’s foot, but it must be the left hind foot! Also, rabbits’ feet that you can buy cheaply may not be considered lucky. The most “lucky” feet are those taken from rabbits that are caught or killed in a cemetery. Even the times that the rabbit is killed may matter; some sources suggest that only a rabbit captured during a full moon, new moon, or on Friday the 13th will have a lucky left hind foot. Some suggest the rabbit must be cross-eyed and must be killed by shooting it with a silver bullet.
      a) Well, as a lucky rabbits foot has no foundation neither did their lucky ark!

G. (9) The hearts of the warriors melted with fear, but their leaders challenged them to courage & fortitude. “Be men & fight!”
   1. Men what area of your life do you need a leader to come alongside of you & yell, “put down your purse, pick up a weapon, & be a man!”
   2. What are you afraid of? Financials fears? Habits you can’t break? Old friends that aren’t a healthy influence in your life, but don’t know what to do?
      a) Get on your knees & fight like a man!
      b) It’s like what Alexander the Great replied, when he was told the Persians were as the sands on the seashore, “One butcher is not afraid of a whole flock of sheep!”

H. 2ND DEFEAT! (10,11)
   l. 30,000 - what a surprise when their poorly equipped militia was severely defeated by the well-armed, highly disciplined Philistine army.
J. Thats pretty bad when your good luck charm...gets stolen!!!

K. DEATH! (12-22)
L. OF ELI! (12-18)
M. Sitting on a backless seat, beside the highway, awaiting info from the battle field.
   1. On the wall the spotter sees a runner speeding toward the city w/news.

N. In Eli’s case, his death was judgment from God; in his daughter-in-law’s it was the result of her burden for the glory of God.

¹ Warren Wiersbe: With The Word; 1 Sam.4
O. (18) From Ps.78 & Jer.7:12 we know that *Shiloh* was totally destroyed.
   1. Read Ps.78:60-62.
   2. Jer.7:11,12 Has this house, which is called by My name, become a den of thieves in your eyes? Behold, I, even I, have seen it, says the Lord. But go now to My place which was in *Shiloh*, where I set My name at the first, and see what I did to it because of the wickedness of My people Israel.

P. OF ELI’S DAUGHTER-IN-LAW! (19-20)

Q. Phinehas’s pregnant wife was so upset by the news that she went into premature labor & died during the birthing process.

R. Who can count the trials this woman had already endured?
   1. She had had a troubled life; yet she stayed with her husband, bore his children, cared for him & them.

S. What a day of loss! *Each item like another blow of the hammer, flattening the iron on the anvil.*
   1. They 1st lost 4000 men; then the ark (God’s glory); then Hophni & Phinehas; then 30,000 foot soldiers; then their high priest Eli; then Phinehas’ wife.

T. DEPARTURE! (21,22)

U. OF GOD’S GLORY! (21,22)

V. Known also as the *Shekinah!* Denoted the presence & the majesty of God.
   1. The visible presence of God, forcefully taken away from them, is too great to be described with words.

W. Would you want your name to Ichabod? (אִכָּבֹוד Inglorious/no glory; or “Where is the glory?”)
   1. Or Ben-Oni (son of my sorrow); or Jabez (he will cause pain); or Beriah (tragedy).
   2. Jesus will give us a new name (Rev.2:17) & write on us *His new name* (Rev.3:12)

X. The glory has departed - The glory of god dwelt in Israel but their sin forced God to depart at an hour when they most needed Him.
   1. Read Ps.78:56-62
   2. Israel’s history is a story of receiving and then losing the glory of God.

Y. Israel had neither the ark nor the glory of God; they were naked before their enemies.
   1. Had they been concerned about God’s glory, they would have repented of their sins & obeyed Him, but it was too late.
Z. What has happened to the glory of God? Where’s the glorious presence and power of God in our lives? Where is the glory in our marriages, in our families? Where has the glory gone in the church? Are our lives filled with the presence, and power of the Holy Spirit?

1. The children of Israel first departed from the Lord, and then the glory of the Lord departed from them.

2. When they should have repented, and returned, they stayed the course of disobedience, and it would cost them dearly!

AA. Do you need to return to the Lord this morning so that you might once again experience His glory? [“Superstition Ain’t The Way!”]

1. What better day to experience His Glory again than today, on Pentecost!