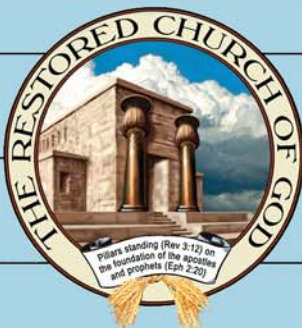


THE RESTORED CHURCH OF GOD

CHILDREN'S BIBLE LESSONS



The Philistines Plague Israel



LEVEL 4
LESSON 8

The Philistines

Plague Israel

In our last Lesson, we saw that the nation of Israel continued to make the same mistakes over and over again. After Joshua's death, God chose judges to lead them. For a while, the people would obey God. But when the judge died, Israel would quickly return to copying the pagan beliefs of the nations



surrounding them and worshiping their false gods. When this happened, God would punish them for their disobedience. After a time, they would turn back to God, and he would choose another judge to lead them. This cycle of obedience to God followed by turning away from God to worship false gods was repeated throughout Israel's history.

A Foolish Vow

For 18 years, God used the Ammonites to

punish Israel. The Ammonites attacked and mistreated the Israelites badly during this time—so badly that it seemed Israel would be completely destroyed. Once again, the people cried out, asking God to forgive them for being disobedient to Him. God heard their prayers and sent a mighty warrior named Jephthah to lead them.

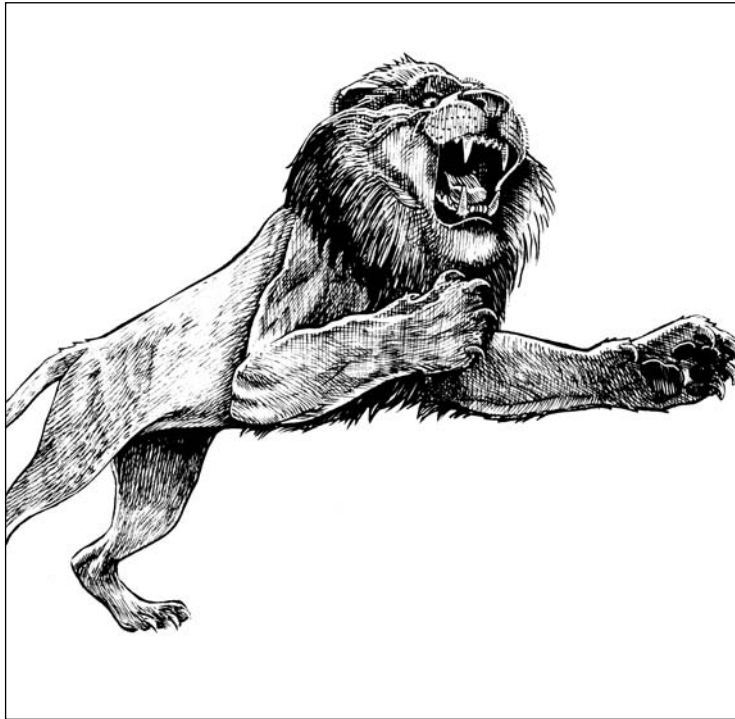
Because the Ammonite king wanted to take all of Israel's land by force, Jephthah sent messengers to the king, saying, "Why have you come to fight against us and take the land that God gave to us? Can't we settle this peacefully?" However, the king was not interested in peace, so Jephthah prepared for battle.



Jephthah made a vow to God, “If you will give us victory over the Ammonites, then the first person who comes out of my house to meet me, I will offer as a burnt offering” (Judges 11:30).

God did help Israel defeat the Ammonites. After the victory, Jephthah returned to his house, and the first one to meet him was his daughter. Jephthah no longer felt great happiness over Israel’s victory as he remembered the promise he had made to God. He sadly realized how foolish his vow was.

Even though God allowed people to make vows in Old Testament times, we read in the New Testament, in Matthew 5:33-37, that Christ teaches we should not make oaths or vows today. Sometimes when we want something very badly, we might quickly make a promise that we later regret.



The Mighty Samson

Israel turned away from God once again, and for 40 years God used the Philistines to punish Israel for their disobedience. God knew they would eventually turn to Him and ask for help. So even before Samson was born, God chose Samson to be the one who would deliver Israel from the Philistines.

God told Samson’s parents that their son was to be a Nazarite from birth. Usually, this promise, called a Nazarite vow, was made for a specific length of time in order for a person to offer special service to God (Numbers 6:1-8). But Samson was to keep this promise for his entire life. This meant he was never to cut his hair. He was not to eat or drink anything made from grapes, not to drink wine or any alcoholic beverages, and not to touch dead bodies. God made Samson many times stronger than

any ordinary man and, if Samson kept the Nazarite vow, he would also keep his extraordinary strength.

When he became a man, Samson fell in love with a Philistine woman. He decided he wanted to marry her even though he knew that God said the men of Israel should not take wives from the nations around them (Deuteronomy 7:3). Samson’s parents tried to talk him out of it, but he was determined to marry her.

During one trip to see his bride-to-be, a lion jumped out of the underbrush to attack him. Samson used the special strength that God had given him to kill the lion with his bare hands. He dragged the dead animal off the road, and then traveled on to visit his bride-to-be. He told no one of what had happened.

A Riddle

Some time later, when Samson was to get

married, he and his parents traveled down the same road. He decided to look for what remained of the lion. Only the bones were left, but inside them was a beehive filled with honey. He took some of the honey and shared it with his parents on the way to his bride-to-be’s house. However, he did not tell them where he had found it.

Thirty Philistine men came to celebrate Samson’s wedding feast with him. He told them a riddle, promising to give each of them expensive new clothing if they answered it before the seven-day wedding feast ended. But if they could not give him the correct answer, they had to give him 30 sets of expensive new clothes. They agreed, and eagerly listened to his riddle.

“Out of the eater came something to eat, out of the strong came something sweet,” Samson told them (Judges 14:14).

No matter how hard they tried, they could not solve the riddle, so they threatened Samson's wife. If she did not give them the answer, then they would burn down her father's house. Afraid of their threats, she went to Samson and begged him to give her the answer. At first he would not tell her, but she would not let him rest until he did. So he finally gave in and gave the answer to his wife.

On the last day of the wedding feast, the men told Samson they had solved his riddle. "What is sweeter than honey? What is stronger than a lion?" they said (Judges 14:18).

Samson became very angry. He realized his wife had told them the answer. "You'll have your reward," he shouted at them. He was so mad about being tricked that he went down to the Philistine city of Ashkelon. There he killed 30 men, stripped them of their shirts and robes, and brought these clothes back to pay the men who had answered his riddle. Then he and his parents went home, leaving his new wife behind.

Samson Takes Revenge

After Samson got over his anger, he went back to get his wife and bring her home with him. But when he came to her father's house, he learned her father had given her in marriage to another man. Samson became so angry that he frightened her father, who quickly suggested he could marry the younger sister instead. That just made things worse in Samson's mind. His thoughts were filled with finding a way to get revenge against the Philistines.

After thinking of different ways to get even, Samson decided to catch 300 foxes. He tied them together tail to tail, and then put a fiery torch between each pair of tails. Next, he set the foxes loose in the Philistines' fields—the fire quickly blazed out of control and scorched all the grain, vineyards and olive orchards (Judges 15:4-5). That made the Philistines really angry, so they set fire to his father-in-law's house, killing Samson's wife and her father.

Now Samson was even angrier. He told the Philistines that he would not quit making trouble for them until he was satisfied he had paid them

back for the deaths of his wife and her father. The battles between them went on and on until Samson had killed a great number of Philistines.

When he felt satisfied he had gotten even, Samson went down to Judah and stayed in a cave at Etam. The Philistines learned where he was hiding, so they marched against Judah. That worried the men of Judah, who asked, "Why have you come up against us?"

"We have come to bind Samson, to do to him as he did to us," responded the Philistines (Judges 15:10).

Three thousand men of Judah went to the caves where Samson was staying and talked him into peacefully turning himself over to the Philistines. He allowed himself to be tied up with thick ropes. Then he was taken to where the Philistine army was camped. The soldiers rushed up to take hold of him—but because of Samson's great strength, he easily snapped off the ropes. Then he grabbed the jawbone of a donkey's skeleton that was lying nearby and used it as a weapon against the Philistine soldiers. With it he killed 1,000 men, and wounded many more, until the rest of the soldiers ran away in fear (Judges 15:16).

Once again, the Philistines had tried to kill Samson. But they failed because of the mighty strength God had given him.

All this fighting made Samson very tired and thirsty. Because he was feeling weak, he knew that the Philistines might return and be able to take him prisoner. So he prayed, asking God to provide water for him to drink. God heard Samson's prayer. He caused a nearby hollow place in the ground to fill with water. Samson drank the fresh, cool water until he felt strong again. God had not only helped him win the battle against the Philistines, but had also saved his life by giving him water.

Then Samson traveled down to the Philistines' capital city, Gaza. People there recognized him because of all the stories they had heard about his great strength, big muscles and long hair. He found a room at an inn where he could stay overnight. While he was asleep, the Philistines surrounded the

inn, saying, “We will wait until the first light of morning, then we will kill him.”

Samson rested until midnight, then he secretly left the inn and headed to the city gates. But he found that the heavy gates were closed and locked. Remember, Samson was no ordinary man. He pulled up the gates and the posts to which they were attached, slung them on his shoulders, and carried them up to the top of the nearby hill. He hurried away into the night, away from the trap the Philistines had set to capture him (Judges 16:2-3).

Samson and Delilah

The Philistines wanted to capture Samson, but they knew his great strength meant that a lot of them would die trying, so they came up with a plan. They would pay a beautiful Philistine woman named Delilah to learn the secret of his strength. Samson fell in love with Delilah. However, she was only interested in the large amount of money that the Philistine leaders promised her.

Over and over, Delilah begged Samson to tell her what made him so strong. Samson thought it was a game, so he said, “If I am bound with seven fresh raw-leather straps, then I will become as weak as any other man.” She hurried to tell the leaders. They gave her the straps, and while Samson slept she tied him up. Then she yelled, “Oh no, the Philistines are coming!” Samson jumped out of bed and easily broke off the straps (Judges 16:4-9).

Delilah was not happy that he had tricked her. She pouted and pleaded with him to tell her the truth. Samson told her that if he were tied up with new ropes, he would lose his great strength. Once again, she waited until he slept to tie him up. But when she called out that the Philistines were coming, he broke the ropes as if they were weak sewing thread (vs. 10-12).

Delilah was not about to lose her big reward. She pestered Samson over and over. Eventually, he told her the secret of stealing his strength was to weave seven locks of his hair in a loom. She waited until he slept then wove his hair. But once again, when he awoke, his strength was as great as ever.

Upset with his games, Delilah would not leave him alone, saying, “How can you say you love me when you lie to me about where your great strength comes from?”

Finally, Samson told her the truth, “A razor has never cut my hair because I have been a Nazarite from before my birth. If my hair were to be cut, I would become as any other man.”

While he was sound asleep, she sent for a barber, who shaved his head. This time, when she cried out that the Philistines were coming, Samson jumped up, but found his great strength was gone. True to what God had said, when Samson’s Nazarite vow was broken, his strength was no greater than an ordinary man’s.

The Philistines took Samson prisoner, fastening him hand and foot with heavy bronze chains (vs. 13-20).

At the prison, the Philistines put out Samson’s eyes. Then they made him push a heavy grinding stone in the mill. Around and around he walked. Unable to see anything, he spent all his days pushing the big millstone. As time passed, his hair began to grow.

The Philistines gathered at a feast for one of their false gods and to celebrate the capture of Samson. All the people were eager to see the man who had created so much trouble for them and who had killed so many of their men. He came into their hall, led like a harmless pet by a little boy. Everyone made fun of him and thanked their god for delivering Samson into their hands.

Samson quietly said to the boy, “I am so tired from pushing that big millstone. I can’t see them,



but I know there are two big pillars nearby. Can you lead me to them so I can rest against them for a minute?" Samson knew these two pillars held up the main part of the building.

As soon as he felt the solid stone of the pillars against his hands on either side of him, he stretched out both arms, placed his hands firmly against the pillars, and prayed to God, "I pray that you would strengthen me, just this once, O God, so that I can get even with the Philistines for blinding me." Then Samson pushed against the two pillars with all his might. The entire building came crashing down, killing Samson and more Philistines than all those he had killed before (vs. 22-30).

Samson had been judge of Israel for 20 years. After his death, Israel once again stopped obeying God. They returned to their evil ways of worshiping the false gods of the nations surrounding them.

Judges 21:25 tells us, "In those days there was no king in Israel; every man did what was right in his own eyes."

Test Your Memory:

- 1) Jephthah's foolish vow and Christ's teaching in Matthew 5:33-37 tell us that we should not make _____ or _____.
- 2) Samson would have great strength only as long as he did not cut his _____.
- 3) Samson killed what kind of wild animal with his bare hands?





Shiloh to worship at God's Tabernacle. Hannah went off by herself into the Tabernacle and prayed with all her heart for God to give her a son. "If You will do this for me, I will give him to serve You, Lord, all the days of his life."

God heard Hannah's prayer. Eventually, she gave birth to a baby boy. She named him Samuel, meaning, "I have asked him of the Lord" (I Samuel 1:20).

4) What kind of strange weapon did Samson use against the Philistines?

5) What was the name of the woman who learned the secret of Samson's great strength? _____

The Prophet Samuel

In the land of Israel, among the tribe of Ephraim, lived a Levite named Elkanah with his two wives. One wife, Peninnah, had both sons and daughters. But his other wife, Hannah, had none. Elkanah loved Hannah more than Peninnah, and felt very sorry that Hannah did not have children too. He was also sad because he heard how often Peninnah made rude comments to Hannah, making fun of her for having no children. As time passed, Hannah became unhappier.

God's Tabernacle was in the city of Shiloh, where Eli the priest served God. Elkanah and his whole family traveled to



After Samuel was weaned, Elkanah and Hannah took him to God's Tabernacle and turned him over to the care of Eli so that he could serve God for the rest of his life.

Eli's Awful Sons

As Samuel grew, Eli taught him how to serve in God's Tabernacle. Eli's sons, Hophni and Phinehas, were priests serving under their father. But they were greedy and looked out for themselves rather than following God's Way.

Eli did not know all the wrong things his sons were doing, but God saw their bad deeds. He sees everything we do and knows everything we think.

In time, Eli began to hear stories about his sons' evil behavior. He asked them, "Why do you do such things? I hear of your evil dealings from all the people. You must stop behaving so badly." But since he did nothing to punish them, they paid no attention to their father and continued their bad ways.

Then God sent a man to speak to Eli. "Because you have not corrected your sons for their evil deeds, you have honored them above God. Now God has sent me to tell you, both of your sons will die on the same day, and none of the men in your family will live to old age. Furthermore, all your family will come to beg money and food from the priest whom God will put in their place" (I Samuel 2:27-36).

Samuel Hears a Voice

Meanwhile, Samuel was growing up. God, along with the people of Israel, saw that he did what was right as he faithfully served in the Tabernacle. One

night, while sleeping in his bed in a room near the elderly priest, Samuel heard someone call "Samuel! Samuel!" He thought it was Eli, so he ran to his bedside. But Eli told him, "I didn't call you. Go back to sleep."

Samuel returned to his bed, but just as he was falling asleep, he heard "Samuel! Samuel!" He ran back to Eli, but again, Eli said that he had not called him. He sent Samuel back to bed once more.

When it happened the third time, Eli realized that Samuel was hearing God's voice calling him. Eli told him, "The next time you hear your name called, say, 'Speak, Lord, for your servant hears.'" So Samuel went back to his bed, and when he again heard "Samuel! Samuel!" he replied, "Speak, Lord, for your servant hears" (I Samuel 3:10).



God told Samuel, "What I am about to do in Israel will make everyone's ears ring. I am about to do against Eli and his family all that I have spoken, because Eli did not stop his sons from disrespecting Me or from continuing in their evil deeds. I am going to punish them" (I Samuel 3:11-14).

Since Samuel cared deeply for Eli, he did not want to tell him this bad news from God. But Eli demanded that Samuel tell him what God had said, so Samuel obediently did. Eli listened, and then told Samuel, "Let God do what seems right and fair to Him."

Samuel continued to serve God faithfully. Before long, he was known in all of Israel as a chosen prophet of God. The Israelites did not elect him, and he did not ask to become a prophet. Yet once he understood that God had specially chosen him, Samuel did everything that God expected him to do.

Israel Attacked!

During this time, God allowed the Philistine army to attack Israel, who had returned to disobeying Him. When Israel's army went out to fight against the army of the Philistines, Israel was defeated, and lost 4,000 men in the battle.

Returning to camp, the leaders of the army asked the elders, "Why has God allowed this defeat? We must bring the Ark of the Covenant from Shiloh to set in our camp so that God will be with us and give us victory" (I Samuel 4:1-3).

Eli's two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, came with the Ark. When the army of Israel saw the Ark coming, they gave such a mighty shout that the entire Philistine army heard it far away in their camp. They grew frightened when they learned that the Ark of Israel's God had been brought to the battlefield, because that had never happened before. "Who can deliver us from the power of this mighty God? Didn't He bring plagues against the Egyptians?" they asked.

But the Philistine leaders urged them to fight. "Be brave! Do you want to become Israel's slaves, as we have made them ours?" The Philistine soldiers went back into the battle determined to win, and they did.

Back in Shiloh, Eli was concerned that his sons had taken the Ark of the Covenant into the battle. Now 98 years old, he was blind. He sat beside the city gates waiting for someone to bring a report of what was happening. A young man came running into the city from the battlefield to tell everyone the news. His clothes were torn and bloodstained, and he was nearly out of breath.

"What's going on?" Eli called when he heard the people crying out in alarm.

The man ran over to tell him, "I managed to escape from the battle without being killed or captured. The Philistines have chased Israel's army. Thirty thousand of our soldiers have died, including your sons, Hophni and Phinehas. Worst of all, the ark of God has been captured!"

Eli was so upset by this terrible news that he fell backward off his high seat beside the gate,

broke his neck, and died (I Samuel 4:18). He had judged Israel for 40 years.

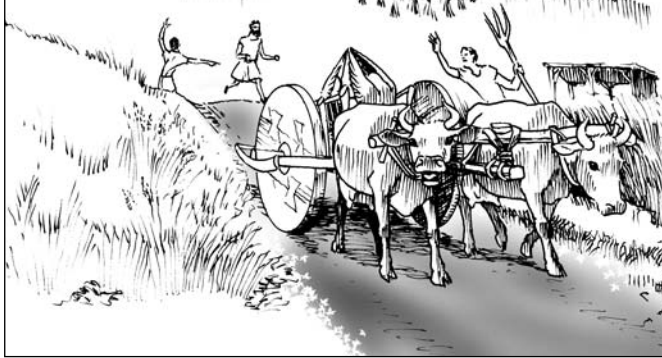
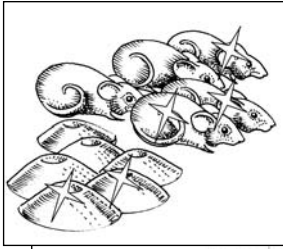
Philistines Plagued by God

The Philistines were feeling good about having defeated Israel, especially since they had captured the Ark of Israel's God. They carried it to their city of Ashdod and placed it beside the idol of their god, Dagon, in the house dedicated to him. The next day, when people came to see the captured Ark, the idol of Dagon had fallen forward on its face before the Ark of God. The Philistines wondered how that had happened as they picked up the idol of Dagon and sat it upright. The next morning, when they came to Dagon's house, they found that not only had the idol fallen forward on its face before the Ark of God, but its head and hands had also been cut off. Only the trunk of the idol's body remained (I Samuel 5:1-5).

God was showing them that He was not pleased that the Ark was placed in the house of a false god. Next, God brought a plague of painful oozing boils on all the people who lived in the city of Ashdod and the surrounding area. The leaders decided they must get rid of the Ark of God, so they sent for all the leading men among the Philistines to discuss how to remove it. "What shall we do with the Ark of the God of Israel?" they asked.

The leading men answered, "Let the Ark of the God of Israel be taken to Gath." As soon as the Ark was in Gath, God caused the people there to break out with the same awful boils, and some became so sick they died. All the people in Gath demanded the Ark be taken away and put somewhere else!

The Ark was sent to the city of Ekron. But by now, everyone had heard of the terrible plague of sores that had happened in the cities where the Ark had been, and they did not want the same thing to happen to them. In addition to breaking out in boils, great numbers of mice came into Ekron and were so thick on the ground that they overran every house, barn and field. In a panic, the people demanded, "Send away the Ark of the God of Israel, and let it return to its own place that it may not kill us and our people" (I Samuel 5:10).



Sending Back the Ark

After seven months of keeping the Ark, the Philistines wanted to get rid of it and the plagues that had resulted after capturing it. Their priests suggested returning the Ark to Israel: “But do not send it back empty. We must also send a guilt offering of five golden boils and five golden mice to represent the plagues we have suffered. Also, we must build a cart from new wood that we can set the Ark upon, and cows that have never pulled a cart before pull it. Then we will send it off, and let it go its way. If the cows pull the cart toward Israel’s town of Beth-shemesh, then we will know it is the God of Israel who has caused these plagues” (I Samuel 6:9).

The Philistines did as the priests suggested. After hitching cows to a newly built cart, they placed the golden objects beside the Ark on the back of the cart and sent the cows on their way. The cows headed down the road, turning toward Beth-shemesh.

People from Beth-shemesh were harvesting wheat when the cows pulled the cart into a field at the edge of town. Everyone became curious when the cart stopped, especially since the cart had no driver. They went to see what it was. When they looked in the back of the cart and saw the Ark they began to give thanks to God for returning it to

Israel. Soon everyone in the surrounding area knew about the Ark’s return and came rushing to see it.

Five of the Philistine leaders who had been secretly following the cart saw it stop in the field at Beth-shemesh. They hurried back to give their priests and leaders the news that the plagues had not happened by chance, but that the God of Israel had indeed caused them (I Samuel 6:16).

The people of Beth-shemesh were grateful to God for the Ark’s safe return. They broke up the cart



and used the wood to build a fire, then offered two cows as a burnt offering to God. Some of them wanted to look inside the Ark, even though they knew that God had warned Israel in years past to touch the Ark only by its carrying poles. Anyone who touched it carelessly would die, as would anyone who showed disrespect to the Ark, which was the same as showing disrespect to God (Leviticus 16:2; 26:2; Numbers 4:5-6, 15). The joy of the people of Beth-shemesh turned to sadness when a number of men looked into the Ark of God and died!

The people of Beth-shemesh asked the men of Kirjath-jearim to come and take the Ark away. They took it to the home of Abinadab, a Levite, where it stayed for the next 20 years (I Samuel 7:1-2).

More Attacks

Over the next several years, Israel continued to be attacked by the Philistines.

Samuel told them, “If you will return to worship and obey God with all your heart, if you will put away the false idols from among you, if you will serve God only, He will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines” (I Samuel 7:3).

So once again, Israel decided it was time to turn from their evil deeds. They threw away all their pagan idols and worshiped only God. Upon seeing the Israelites sincerity, Samuel called a meeting in the town of Mizpah. A large gathering of people came together to pray for forgiveness from God for their bad behavior. They also fasted, which means they went without food and water for an entire day, to show God they were truly sorry (I Samuel 7:5-6).

By now, the Philistines had recovered from the plagues God had sent on them for capturing the Ark. When they heard that a large group of Israelites was meeting in Mizpah, they decided it would be a good time to attack.

When the Israelites learned the Philistine army was coming to attack them, they became very afraid. They begged Samuel to pray to God and ask for His protection from the Philistines.

As Samuel offered up a lamb as a burnt offering, the Philistine army arrived. When God heard Samuel’s prayer, and saw that the people of Israel were genuinely sorry, He sent a severe storm filled with deafening booms of thunder and blinding flashes of lightning to panic the army. Every Philistine soldier ran away in fear. The Israelites ran after them and defeated them with God’s help.

After that, Israel did not have to worry about the Philistines attacking them for as long as Samuel lived.

Israel Rejects God as King

When Samuel grew very old, he placed his sons, Joel and Abijah, as judges over Israel. But just as Eli’s sons had behaved badly and had not obeyed God, Samuel’s sons acted the same way. Instead of judging the people of Israel fairly, they took money to judge in favor of those who paid them.

All of Israel’s leaders came to tell Samuel of his sons’ evil deeds. “You are old and your sons do not

walk in your ways. Now give us a king to govern us like the other nations,” they demanded.

Samuel was very unhappy with their request, so he prayed to God for help. God told Samuel, “Do what the people say. They haven’t rejected you, but have rejected Me as King over them” (I Samuel 8:4-7).

God also told Samuel to warn the people about what having a king over them would mean. Samuel told them, “The king will take your sons to drive his chariots and be his horsemen. He will force them to serve in the army. He will make some plow his fields and reap his harvest. Others will have to make weapons of war and repair his chariots. He will take your daughters to make expensive perfumes for him, as well as to cook and bake for him. You will have to give up the best of your fields, your olive orchards and your vineyards so the king’s servants can have them. He will take one-tenth of all your grain and vineyards to feed his army officers and his servants. He will take your servants and your livestock and put them to work for him. You will be his slaves. And after you have had enough of slavery, you will ask God for help, but He will not listen to your prayers!” (I Samuel 8:10-18).

However, the Israelites did not care about Samuel’s warning from God. They refused to listen to him. “We will have a king over us!” they shouted. Samuel went to God with their decision, and God said to him, “Listen to them and give them a king.”

For 400 years after the death of Joshua, judges chosen by God had led Israel. This period of history ended when Israel was given a king to rule over them.

Test Your Memory:

- 1) Which one of Elkanah’s wives prayed to God asking for a son? _____
- 2) Who called Samuel’s name in the middle of the night? _____
- 3) Who chose Samuel to be a prophet? _____
- 4) Which enemy of the Israelites captured God’s ark? _____
- 5) When Israel demanded a king to rule over them, whom were they rejecting? _____

BIBLE MEMORY: I Samuel 8:7

WORD SEARCH

W	S	N	E	K	R	O	N	P	J	A
P	H	I	L	I	S	T	I	N	E	S
H	I	R	K	E	A	H	H	O	P	H
E	L	I	A	T	M	H	A	S	H	K
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G	A	B	I	N	A	D	A	B	Q	G

Find these words:

Abinadab
Ashkelon
Delilah
Eli
Elkanah
Ekron
God
Hannah
Jephthah
King
Levite
Lion
Nazarite
Philistines
Riddle
Samuel
Samson
Shiloh