

Personal/Group Study Guide
Week of April 27, 2008
“Religion vs. Relationship”
1 Samuel 4-7

- 1) Have you ever recently felt or said the question posed in 4:3? Who or what was your Philistine(s)? What was our response? How did you take action to meet the defeat? Did you consider using a symbol of God to empower you for more warfare or did you go directly to God for empowerment? The Israelites went for the Ark of the Covenant plus Hophni and Phinehas as their chief religious symbols for immediate power rather than go directly to God. Note the next outcome(s) in the battle(s) for the Israelites. What are your chief religious symbols? Is the symbol really where the power is? How and why do you/we settle for anything less than the real manifest presence of the Lord in our midst?
- 2) In 4:19-22 we read that the wife of Phinehas had died moments after birthing a child. She had named her child Ichabod, to state that “the glory of the Lord had departed from Israel, for the ark of God has been captured.” Notice that her response was different than the people of Israel, the messenger from war, and presumably Hophni, Phinehas, and Eli. They, unlike this dying mom, were much more concerned about the Ark of the Covenant being taken than about the glory of God being departed. Is your concern more over the presence of God departing a place, people group, or a person or do you have more concern for the symbols of religion being taken? Explain.
- 3) Isn't it interesting that in 6:3 we see that the Philistines, seemingly, were more in alignment with God as to how a person or people group should respond to the judgment of God than the Israelites – His very own people? What did the Philistines do that the Israelites should have done all along? Was this perhaps a “moving reminder” to the Israelites of what they should have done in the first place (offered a guilt offering)? Has perhaps similar convicting instances ever happened to you in your life from the most unlikely sources?
- 4) Read 6:19-7:2. Why did God strike the 70 men down who looked into the Ark? What is the significance of this scene for our lives?
- 5) In 7:2-4 it says that it was a long time - 20 years - that the people were mourning and seeking after God, thinking that this is all they were required to do in order to have the manifest presence of God amongst them. But Samuel reminded them otherwise. What did Samuel call them to do? What real action were they forgoing and needing to begin? How does this action apply to our lives or look like in our lives? Ridding ourselves of foreign gods, committing ourselves fully to the Lord, and serving Him only – how is God calling each one of these 3 action points to emerge from our lives? Note what the promised payoff is “deliverance” – personally and corporately. Are you in need of some deliverance today? Then take the necessary action!
- 6) Read 7:7-11 and think/discuss how this is a prototype picture of the Cross and the events at Calvary and the sacrifice of Christ.
- 7) In light of 7:12-14 where is your “Ebenezer” – or place of transition from the Christian religion to being in relationship with Jesus Christ? Place where you started your “do-over” or real journey on The Road Less Traveled. Share your place and the memorial/memories behind it. Perhaps you have a few Ebenezers. Where is your present place of peace and who is your #1 person of peace?
- 8) How can the church help, assist and resource God's call on your life? Are you taking action regarding your call? If so, how? What's the next step?