

## KEEPERS OF THE ARK vs. KEEPERS OF THE TRUTH

*1Samuel 4:2 And the Philistines put themselves in array against Israel: and when they joined battle, Israel was smitten before the Philistines: and they slew of the army in the field about four thousand men.*

*1Samuel 4:3 And when the people were come into the camp, the elders of Israel said, Wherefore hath the LORD smitten us to day before the Philistines? Let us fetch the ark of the covenant of the LORD out of Shiloh unto us, that, when it cometh among us, it may save us out of the hand of our enemies.*

The Ark of the Covenant replaced faith in the God of Israel in the early days of Eli the High Priest. The Ark was worshipped rather than God. Keepers of the Ark are those who lose sight of the truth of God and focus on the ceremonial, traditional and ritualistic things associated with religion. With time, the children of Israel became keepers of the Ark but not Keepers of the Truth. In other words, they associated seeing the Ark of the Covenant with salvation and protection of God rather than the God who is omnipresent, omniscient and omnipotent; the God who cannot be reduced to a box made of acacia wood overlaid with gold. God hates this because it is no different from creating a new false religion.

The children of Israel forgot what God told their forefathers. “And the LORD spake unto you out of the midst of the fire: ye heard the voice of the words, but saw no similitude; only ye heard a voice” (Deut 4:12). The commandments of God are invisible – but powerful eternal truths. This is what the children of Israel neglected and, with time, paid a very heavy price. It is significant that 4000 Israelites were killed in the first battle, but the number increased more than sevenfold to 30,000 Israelites killed when the Ark came into the camp. “And the Philistines fought, and Israel was smitten, and they fled every man into his tent: and there was a very great slaughter; for there fell of Israel thirty thousand footmen” (I Samuel 4:10). There appears to be a link between what the children of Israel said and the sevenfold judgment that followed, “...Let us fetch the ark of the covenant of the LORD out of Shiloh unto us, that, when it cometh among us, it may save us out of the hand of our enemies” (I Samuel 4:3). The Ark was perceived to be something akin to a magic wand, a fetish. Just fetch it and it will do its job irrespective of the spiritual condition of Israel. Indeed, this attitude which provoked God was embodied in its highest spiritual official – Eli the High Priest.

*1Samuel 4:16 And the man said unto Eli, I am he that came out of the army, and I fled to day out of the army. And he said, What is there done, my son?*

**1Samuel 4:17** *And the messenger answered and said, Israel is fled before the Philistines, and there hath been also a great slaughter among the people, and thy two sons also, Hophni and Phinehas, are dead, and the ark of God is taken.*

**1Samuel 4:18** *And it came to pass, when he made mention of the ark of God, that he fell from off the seat backward by the side of the gate, and his neck brake, and he died: for he was an old man, and heavy. And he had judged Israel forty years.*

Carefully note the fact that Eli did not react much to the news about the death of the Israelites and even his own sons, Hophni and Phinehas. The moment, however, he heard that the Ark of the Covenant was taken by the Philistines, he “fell from off the seat backward by the side gate, and his neck brake, and he died”. Eli did not react with physical revulsion when his two sons defiled the sacrifices in the Tabernacle at Shiloh and committed fornication with the women who came to the Tabernacle. This proves that Eli was a Keeper of the Ark and not a Keeper of the Truth of God. Not only Eli, but his own daughter-in-law followed piously in the footsteps of Eli and the whole of Israel – she too had become blind to the real spiritual state of Israel. Consider her priorities in what the Bible tells us. “And his daughter in law, Phinehas' wife, was with child, near to be delivered: and when she heard the tidings that the ark of God was taken, and that her father in law and her husband were dead, she bowed herself and travailed; for her pains came upon her” (I Samuel 4:19).

**1Samuel 4:21** *And she named the child Ichabod, saying, The glory is departed from Israel: because the ark of God was taken, and because of her father in law and her husband.*

**1Samuel 4:22** *And she said, The glory is departed from Israel: for the ark of God is taken.*

Eli, his daughter-in-law, and Israel had become Keepers of the Ark alone for they over time replaced the eternal truth and laws of God with a form of idol worship. The Ark cannot save anyone, only God can. The house of the High Priest and all of Israel lived in gross sin and this did not induce remorse and repentance because they believed that as long as the Ark was physically present with them, they were safe. There was no genuine repentance in the land. These were the days of the Judges when everyone did what was good in his own eyes. “In those days there was no king in Israel, but every man did that which was right in his own eyes” (Judges 17:6). Thankfully, God is always on his throne – there is no crisis in the Kingdom of God because God has all power. Since God could not speak to the High Priest, his sons and Israel, he spoke to a child named Samuel. When the King of Israel, the Pharisees, Sadducees and Scribes, among others, were fixated on traditions, ceremonies and fetishes, the

Lord Jesus spoke to some fishermen. A man who called himself “the voice crying in the wilderness”, rebuked the Pharisees with these words:

***Luke 3:8*** Bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance, and begin not to say within yourselves, *We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, That God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham.*

Let us now consider examples of individuals who were Keepers of the Truth. The twelve Apostles of the Lord Jesus, except Judas, were Keepers of Truth. They did not fall for the hypocrisy and traditions of the Pharisees and similar groups. They were patiently waiting for the salvation of Israel and the world through the promised Messiah. “Philip findeth Nathanael, and saith unto him, We have found him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph” (John 1:45). We can discern two categories of people in the New Testament who sought the blessings of the Lord. The one group used the Lord like one would use an emergency clinic – they had acute needs and pushed their way through crowds to touch the hem of his garment, lifted tiles off the roof to lower one paralyzed down to the Lord, shouted at the top of their voices for him to have mercy and open their eyes, and the list goes on and on. These people were only concerned with their flesh. No wonder the Lord sighed often; he knew their motivation was not salvation and eternal matters.

***Mat 17:15*** Lord, have mercy on my son: for he is lunatick, and sore vexed: for oftentimes he falleth into the fire, and oft into the water.

***Mat 17:17*** Then Jesus answered and said, O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you? how long shall I suffer you? bring him hither to me.

The Apostles were the opposite. None of them came to Jesus because they needed healing or deliverance for their flesh. They were young, sufficiently wealthy fishermen and hence physically able, and yet they gave up everything to follow Jesus. They were Keepers of the Truth – the Truth given to Moses and the prophets about the coming Savior of the world. In fact, we see that from the beginning they were attracted to a man who referred to himself as a voice crying in the wilderness. They avoided the Pharisees and other sects, but recognized John the Baptist as a true representative of what they were searching for. Who or what you follow will reveal your true character. The children of Israel were so blind spiritually they followed the Ark of the Covenant and Hophni and Phinehas, not the God of the Ark of the Covenant. Who are we following today, saints of the Lord Jesus Christ? Let us not make the mistake of thinking that as long as we call ourselves Apostolics, and quote Acts 2:38, all is well with our souls. Of course, we must uphold and love this truth, but do we have a genuine

relation with the God of Acts 2:38? Are we carrying such scriptures around like the Ark of the Covenant thinking they will save us?

**Mark 7:6** *He answered and said unto them, Well hath Esaias prophesied of you hypocrites, as it is written, This people honoureth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me.*

We must repent today! Repent of relying on anything or anyone other than the Lord Jesus Christ. No human being or organization will supplant or usurp the place of the only God and Savior, Jesus Christ. We cannot go to war like the Israelites trusting in material things. We will not use the Lord Jesus Christ like an emergency clinic for the flesh only. In times of war and peace, in times of sickness or health, in times of sorrow or joy, Jesus is our only hope. “[To the chief Musician, Maschil, for the sons of Korah.] As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God” (Psalm 42:1). We should never rest until the Lord will say about us “I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after mine own heart, which shall fulfil all my will” (Acts 13:22). Jacob wrestled with the angel not only because he wanted deliverance from Esau his brother. He knew that God always protected him from the likes of Laban and others. He was tired of being Jacob – he wanted a genuine spiritual transformation. One cannot have a title as a man or woman of God and not feel like one. He wanted holiness, nearness to God, peace and joy that comes from an encounter with the Almighty.

**John 3:5** *Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.*

**John 3:6** *That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.*

Once a person is burning with a passion to become a Keeper of the Truth, only then should such a person come to the waters of baptism in Jesus name and seek the infilling of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38). This is so because only the Lord Jesus can transform us to become Keepers of the Truth. “Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself” (Phil 3:21).