

1 Samuel 4:3

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

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.

Analysis

The elders' statement reveals both right and wrong. Rightly, they acknowledge the LORD 'smote us.' Wrongly, they conclude that bringing the Ark will guarantee deliverance. The phrase 'when it cometh among us, it may save us' treats the Ark as an independent power source. Notice the shift from 'the LORD' to 'it' - the object has replaced the Person. This theological error - trusting symbols rather than the God they represent - recurs throughout Israel's history and into the church age.

Historical Context

The Ark's military function in Israel's early history (crossing Jordan, conquering Jericho) created precedent for expecting victory in its presence. But those victories came with covenant faithfulness; the Ark alone guaranteed nothing.

Related Passages

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Study Questions

1. How do religious symbols sometimes replace genuine relationship with God?
2. What objects or practices might function as 'magic talismans' in contemporary Christianity?

Interlinear Text

וַיֹּאמֶר	אֶל	בְּעַם	בְּעַמְךָ	בְּמִצְבָּה	יְבָא
unto us that when it cometh	And when the people	H413	into the camp	said	
H935	H5971	H4264	H559		
וְיָמִן	לֹא	לְפָנֶיךָ	יְהִי הָיָה	יְהִי הַיּוֹם	
the elders	of Israel	H4100	smitten	Wherefore hath the LORD	us to day
H2205	H3478	H5062	H3068	H3117	
לְפָנֵינוּ	מִשְׁלָת	אֶל יְנֻנוּ	נִקְרַב הַיּוֹם	אַרְוֹן	
before	the Philistines	H3947	H413	out of Shiloh	the ark
H6440	H6430		H7887	H853	H727
בְּקָרְבָּה	וְיָבָא	יְהִי הַיּוֹם	וְיָבָא	בְּקָרְבָּה	
of the covenant	Wherefore hath the LORD	H3068	unto us that when it cometh	among	
H1285		H935		H7130	
וְיִשְׁעֵנוּ	מִן	אִיבְנָה			
us it may save	us out of the hand	H341	of our enemies		
H3467	H3709				

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