

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

וַיָּבֹא	וְהָעָם	אֶל	הַמַּחֲנֶה	וַיֹּאמְרוּ		
unto us that when it cometh	And when the people	H413	into the camp	said		
H935	H5971		H4264	H559		
זְקֵנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל	נִגְפָּנוּ	לָמָּה	יְהוָה	הַיּוֹם		
the elders	of Israel	H4100	smitten	Wherefore hath the LORD	us to day	
H2205	H3478		H5062	H3068	H3117	
לִפְנֵי	פְּלִשְׁתֵּי יָם	נִקְחָה	אֵלַי	מִשִּׁלֹּה	אֶת	אֲרוֹן
before	the Philistines	Let us fetch	H413	out of Shiloh	H853	the ark
H6440	H6430	H3947		H7887		H727
בְּרִית	יְהוָה	וַיָּבֹא	בְּקִרְבֵּנוּ			
of the covenant	Wherefore hath the LORD	unto us that when it cometh	among			
H1285	H3068	H935	H7130			
וַיִּשְׁעֵנוּ	מִיַּד	אֹיְבֵינוּ:				
us it may save	us out of the hand	of our enemies				
H3467	H3709	H341				