

## The Rabbit Foot, A “Hail Mary,” and Lucky Charms

(1 Samuel 4:1-4)

Placement of verse 4:1 “the word of the LORD came to Samuel” should be at the end of chapter 3 (v.21). Samuel is not going to be mentioned once from chapters 4-7. This section deals with “the ark.”

### 1. The Returning Rebels (v.1-2)

- J Out of nowhere, the Philistines come on the scene. They have remained relatively silent since Samson was judge (Judges 16:25-27).
- J They originally appeared in southwest Canaan around 1200 BC and occupied the coastal plains, including Gaza, Ashdod, Ashkelon, Gath, and Ekron.
- J The location of the Philistine war camp indicates that the Philistines are on the attack since they are encamped at Aphek.
- J A battle persists and the Israelites suffer 4,000 casualties (men) on the battlefield.

### 2. The Rhetorical Response (v.3)

- N The elders pose a rhetorical question; they don’t seek to find the answer because they have already assumed the answer within their question. “Why has the LORD defeated us today...?”

Point of Application: We struggle with this question. Why do these apparent “defeats” happen to us? God’s hand will often come in the form of discipline (Hebrews 12:5-12), as a result of unbelief (James 5:5-7), or selfish motives (James 4:1-3). Sometimes others will wrong you (Genesis 50:20), and oftentimes we will never know why this trial has come our way. We can rejoice that God always responds and directs perfectly. He is a God of knowledge, and by Him all actions are weighed (1 Sam. 2:3)

- J The elders were elected officials who were responsible for addressing judicial and legislative matters (Exodus 18:1-7).
- J They ask “why,” yet do not consult the LORD or His only prophet, Samuel, whose words never fell to the ground (1 Sam. 3:19).
- J They concluded that the reason for the defeat was simple: the ark was not present. The wooden box was not on the battlefield.

### 3. Rabbit-Foot Theology (v.3)

- J The ark was a sacred wooden box of acacia wood that was covered in gold. It was over 3 feet long by 2 feet wide and high. The box contained the two tablets of stone, a pot of manna from Israel’s wanderings, and Aaron’s rod that budded (Hebrews 9:4). The mercy seat had two cherubims facing one another with wings outstretched, covering the ark (Ex. 25:22; 1 Chronicles 28:2).
- J They thought the ark’s presence would bring them victory because in the past it had caused their enemies to scatter (Num. 10:35; 14:44-45).
- J There were two errors in the thinking of these elders:
  - o They thought they had the authority to command the ark. They had no legitimate right to acquire or use the ark; only the priests and Levites did.
  - o They had the false theology of symbolism; they supposed that if they had the symbol of the presence of God, they also had the power of God.

Rabbit-Foot Theology: the attempt of man to harness the power of God. It is the desire of people to control God without seeking Him; to use Him but not submit to Him. Technique, or a “how to” is oftentimes the equation to this “secret power.”

The superstitious and ignorant elders forgot that the symbol and the reality were not always going to be the same. They assumed that if you have the symbol, you have the power; they thought that that if they had the ark, they had God (v.3). They thought they could enlist God’s power through external objects.

They falsely asserted that since God’s reputation was represented by the ark, God would not allow His honor (ark) to suffer loss. They think that since they have God’s furniture, they have His power as well.

### 4. The Reinforcements (v.4)

- J Hophni and Phinehas are with the ark. As long as the situation persists with these two worthless men (2:12) the LORD will not bless Israel. Can Israel, as a nation, expect to appropriate the protection and promises of God (represented by the ark) when it is being carried by two reprobates who have despised Him? (2:12, 17, 22, 3:13).
- J The elders, the people, and the priests all thought that they could use God to their own ends; that they can have God’s power without submitting to Him.
- J As dark as the time of Judges, the people cried out to the LORD (Judges 3:9, 15; 4:3; 6:6, 7; 10:10).
- J The elders, the soldiers and Hophni and Phinehas thought they could harness the power of God in an object. Their deaths were an issue of bad theology. Bad theology will not only result in physical pains, but ultimately eternal damnation.