

# The Danger of Faltering and Failing

by Michael Catt

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*The danger of faltering and failing is a real threat to our Christian lives, and we must deal with sin and obey God's commands to avoid it.*

**Duration:** 46:01

**Scripture:** Joshua 11:16-17, Nehemiah 13:23-24, Matthew 6:33

**Topics:** "Failure"

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## Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the danger of faltering and failing in the Christian walk. He references the military's current struggles due to not doing their job the first time because of political correctness. The main lesson for the church is that pet sins can become uncontrollable monsters if they are not dealt with. The preacher then examines the example of three towns - Gaza, Gath, and Ashkelon - and how they represent areas in our lives where God may not be in charge. He emphasizes the importance of dealing with these areas, as whatever we fail to address becomes a greater problem in the future.

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## Transcript

Well, I wish I'd had some energy on that song. Tonight's the last message in the We Press On series. We're going to talk about the danger of faltering and failing.

We're going to be in Joshua and in 1 Samuel. In Joshua and in 1 Samuel. Joshua 11 is where we'll kind of get started.

And I want us to pray. Father, I ask you in Jesus' name that you would help us because there's a danger for each one of us of stumbling across the finish line. There's a danger for every one of us in this room getting off track, getting our eyes off Jesus, allowing little things to come into our lives that we don't deal with, we ignore, things that left unchecked will pull us down, hurt our witness, destroy our testimony, wound our families, hinder the work of the church.

And so, Father God, I ask you in the name of Jesus that you help us to take these truths tucked away in the Old Testament and bring them into our own lives to remind ourselves that sin is serious and it is costly. If we're going to continue to live with a spirit of revival, if we're going to continue to walk in the overflow of a refreshed time, then we have to be aware that the devil is always tempting and wooing us to just take a step back, to settle for less than your best. Help us to hear your heart through your Word by your Spirit

tonight.

In Jesus' name, Amen. I've lived long enough to know that just because you start well, it doesn't mean you will finish well. The best soul winner I ever knew in high school is no longer in the ministry.

My study partner for 20 years on study weeks is no longer in the ministry. The young evangelist who is in my home church that everybody had to hear and everybody wanted to meet, who at age 16 had brochures in the Mississippi Baptist Convention on every seat, was booked every weekend while he was in college, is today twice divorced and an alcoholic. Just because you start well doesn't mean you'll finish.

Most of the guys that I went to college and seminary with that started in ministry are no longer in ministry and many of them not even in church. And yet at some point in their life they said, we're going to do great things for God. But somewhere along the line, the devil got in and they blew it.

You can start off well, but it is how you finish that determines how you will be remembered. Vance Havner used to pray, I pray that I get home before dark, home before I lose my testimony, home before I lose my witness, because no matter how well you run the race, it is the stumble at the end that they will remember. John Bassanio used to tell the story, and I've seen the list, of the names of the young hotshot preacher boys at Oklahoma Baptist University when he was there.

He wrote down the names of 25 men in ministry that looked like they were going places for God. And by 1992 that list was down to two men, John Bassanio and Ron Dunn. You see, just because somebody starts off well doesn't mean they'll finish well.

And too often we hear somebody ask this question, whatever happened to so-and-so? And it is a tragic testimony, and yet it just doesn't even shock me anymore. I'm not shocked anymore. I go every year the first week of December down and spend time with about 35 pastors at Bay Hill, and we play golf for two or three days, and fellowship and talk about the Lord and about what God's doing in our lives and in our churches, and share ideas with one another, and JSTRAC hosts that event for us.

We've been going about seven years. Almost 20% of the guys that we started out with aren't in ministry today. I'm talking about guys in big churches with successful ministries.

But they've shot themselves in the foot, they've fallen to temptation, and every time we go and somebody says, well, whatever happened to so-and-so? And you hear that story, it's a constant reminder to me that I better stay humble before God, because the devil's out trying to destroy and undermine and get us to compromise who we are and what we're about. Ron Dunn used to say that you can go into a cemetery and see on a tombstone, gone but not forgotten. But the tragedy is in the church, we have many people who are forgotten but not gone.

Forgotten as far as their ability to have a witness and a testimony for Christ. Forgotten as far as being used of God like they could have and should have been used of God. I look back over 14 years, and there were people who were in significant positions of leadership in this church, who some don't even go to church anywhere anymore.

You would think that somebody sitting in a church like Sherwood where for years and years the Word of God has been preached without apology and where the standard has been held high, you would think that they would be immune, they would be protected, that if they were in a liberal church that didn't preach the Word of God, yes, maybe, but not in this kind of church. But yet, I can look back over church directories

and I can see people, not people that left and went to other churches, I'm talking about people that left God. You see, there are two ways to backslide.

You can backslide and leave the church, you can backslide and stay in the church, and some people still have their names on the rolls, but for all practical purposes, they're as backslidden as the people who never come, who never contribute, who never do anything. They've gotten away from God. I think there are two keys to finishing well.

Abiding is the key to victory, and obedience is the secret of victory. It's really simple. Abiding.

Abide in me as I abide in you, for Jesus said, apart from me you can do nothing. Obedience, knowing what is right to do and not doing it is a sin. The Christian life is not rocket science.

You don't have to be a theologian. You don't have to have seminars and credits. It's just simple.

It's abiding in Christ and obeying what Christ says. And when we do that, we stay on track. If you look at the people of God and Joshua, you'll find that when they walked in victory, knocking over Jericho was easy.

I mean, they didn't have to lift a finger. All they had to do was walk around a few times, blow the trumpets, and I mean, the walls came down. But when one person disobeyed, the whole nation was affected.

When Achan stole that which was under the ban, then they went out to take a little town that was insignificant, that could have been taken by a handful of people, and they were thoroughly whipped because of disobedience. Because of someone who didn't abide and obey. Now the first thing I want us to see tonight is that there are times when all is not as it seems.

Now let me give you a little thought here that you need to hang on to. Anytime somebody quits the church, drops out of your Sunday school class, quits showing up, suddenly becomes unfaithful, that's not sudden. It is the result of a slow leak, not a blowout.

There are no blowouts in the Christian life. None. It is the result of a slow leak where somewhere in their devotion, in their time, in their walk with God, in their focus on Christ, they begin to slip away and begin to think, well, that's not so bad, and I'm still doing okay, and they just move further and further and further away from God.

And suddenly it hits, from our perspective, it's a blowout. Man, they just quit coming. But they've been on a path of not coming for a long time.

They've been on a path of compromise for a long time. Now, in Joshua chapter 11, in verse 16, you see this long list, and we're not going to take time to read it all, this long list of the results of obedience. It is a list of battles won, of the evidences of God's hand on them, but look at verse 16.

Thus Joshua took all the land. Look at the last part of verse 17. And he captured all their kings and struck them down and put them to death.

Now, what verse 17, the last part, tells me with is that we have to deal radically with sin. Folks, we don't just look at sin and go, well, that's okay. You know, everybody does it.

No, they struck down the enemy. They dealt with the problem because God knows and God understands that sin left unchecked and not dealt with will ultimately contaminate you. And so they struck them down.

Verse 18, Joshua waged a war a long time with all these kings. Now, what that tells me is that victory is not overnight. You're not going to win victory in your Christian life in a moment, in a flash.

I mean, we'd like God to just give us like an alka-salt or just plop a couple of pills in the water and plop, plop, fizz, fizz, drink it, and all of a sudden we're victorious. That's not the way victory works. We're in a battle.

And in fact, we're in a battle for our lives. And in verse 21 and 22, you read about Anakim, the giants in the land. Guess what? Same people that the spies saw 40 years before.

The same people. Numbers 13.33 says, There we saw the giants, the son of Anak, and we were in our own sight like grasshoppers, and so we were in their sight. What amazes me about Numbers 13.33 is that the giants never said that.

They assumed that. The people of God assumed it. So we were in their sight.

Now that's not what God had said. God had said, You go and take the land which I have given you. God didn't say, Unless you run into giants, and then you may be in trouble.

God just said, Go and take the land. Walk in victory. Take what you have.

Take what is yours. Take what I have provided for you. Live up to the promises that I have given you.

And they looked down and said, Oh, we were like grasshoppers in their sight. Well, who told them that? Insecurity and the devil. You take your pick.

Either because of their insecurity and their fear, or because the devil put fear inside of them. But they began to believe a lie. It was a sin of unbelief.

But God wasn't surprised. It's not like those ten spies went over there, and they saw something, and the other two saw the same thing, but they came to different conclusions. It's not like they got over there and said, Lord, did you know that there were giants in this land? Have you ever visited this country before? Do you know how big these people are over here? God wasn't surprised.

It did not change God's plan. Now look at verse 21. Then Joshua came at that time, and cut off from Anakim from the hill country, from Hebron, from Derbe, from Anabin, from all the hill country of Judah, and from all the hill country of Israel.

Joshua utterly destroyed them with their cities. There were no Anakim left in the land of the sons of Israel. Only in Gaza, in Gath, and in Ashdod some remained.

So Joshua took the whole land, according to all that the Lord had spoken to Moses, and Joshua gave it for an inheritance to Israel, according to their divisions by their tribes. Thus the land had rest from war. But I don't want you to miss what he says.

Look at it again. There were no Anakim left in the land. Okay? So what did he just say? He got rid of them.

I mean, we took the land. We were victorious. And in the last six words, And the land had rest from war.

But there's this little phrase at the end of verse 22 that you need to face up to. It says, Only in Gaza, in Gath, and in Ashdod some remained. Only in Gaza, and in Gath, and in Ashdod some remained.

Now it says he took it all. There were no Anakim left. And the land had rest from war.

But they were still enemy in the land. They were still there. And they were in three places.

And apparently, they didn't think these three little places were significant. But we're going to find out tonight it was very significant. No apparent reason is given.

No reason is stated why Joshua went around these three areas and said, I won't deal with Anakim there. But they were left in three areas. And it's those three areas that are a thorn in the flesh to the children of Israel for the rest of the book of Joshua.

When you start studying this, and then when you look on in the Old Testament and see what happened to the people of God, you will find that not dealing with these three small towns is the reason that Israel had so much trouble and oftentimes experienced defeat and shame in their walk with God. Now God had promised victory where? In every place and every day. But they had chosen to not wipe out these three towns.

And so while it appears on the surface that they have victory, that all has been laid on the altar, that they are walking in victory with God, there's Gaza and Gath and Ashdod that they've kind of skirted around. Areas that they refuse to address. Strongholds that they refuse to face.

Now if I were to ask you tonight, do you believe in the Lordship of Jesus Christ? Almost every one of you in this room would say, well yes, of course. But is he Lord of every area of your life? That's a different question. Do you believe in the Lordship of Christ is one question.

Is he Lord of every area of your life is a totally different question. You see, we can sing crown him Lord of all, we can sing crown him King of kings, we can sing he is Lord, but that doesn't necessarily mean that in every area of our life he is in absolute control and we are yielded to him. What may appear like, oh man, we are cooking on all cylinders.

I mean, we are running, boy, we are moving. May be that there is an area in our lives where God is not in charge. Where we've skirted around it, where we've said, now Lord, this has been great.

We've had this refresh conference and I've been at the altar more than I've been in my whole life and I've prayed and I've sought you and I'm just so grateful for what you've done in my life. And then God says, well what about Gaza and Gath and Ashdod? Well, Lord, those are just little things. And so you can walk in and give the appearance of walking in victory and yet there's three little areas that you think will never bother you, never come up to bite you, never hurt you, never attack you, and yet they will.

Secondly, whatever we fail to deal with becomes a greater problem down the road. These three towns have not been dealt with, but the land rested from war. They were through fighting.

Oh man, it's so good just to get over all that and just to be through fighting. Now we can build our houses and put up our swing sets and get our trampoline out back and get our basketball goal up. Now we can get everything set like we've always wanted to do.

We've been marching in the wilderness and now we've got our piece of property, we've got our land, we've got everything. This is wonderful. This is great.

The land rested from war. But these three towns are going to come back and one day send cold chills down the spine of the entire nation. I think, as I was studying this passage, this is one of the lessons that we didn't learn from the first war in Iraq.

Because we said, hey, we got them out of one land, they're contained, we can control them. And every day, American soldiers are dying because we listened to a coalition rather than doing what was right and cutting off the enemy at his head. We could have had Saddam Hussein 12 years ago.

And like that, it would have been over. But now, we're in a resistance because he was on his heels and we let him off the hook. Don't ever think that anything less than absolute surrender of the enemy is acceptable.

Because it's not. That enemy will come back to haunt you. He will rebuild.

He will rearm. He will find new tactics, ways to attack. And I think one of the lessons that we have to learn in this time, and I know I'm not politically correct, but the answer to our problem is not ignoring terrorists.

It's not. There are some pacifists in this world that think if we leave them alone, they will leave us alone. Absolutely not.

Just read what they say. They want you dead. They want to kill you.

One reason they want to kill you is because you're a Christian. And they believe we are infidels. And the only good thing about us is when we're dead.

They don't care if they hurt women. They don't care if they hurt children. They don't care if they butcher.

They don't care if they rape. They don't care about anything. Why? Because somewhere along the line, somebody said, we'll take the gospel some places, but we won't take it over here.

And we just ignored a whole region of the world. And we went to China, and we went to Africa, and we went to Europe, and we came to South America and North America. But we kind of left the Middle East alone.

And now we're dealing with the results of not being willing to do our jobs as Christians. And now our military is dealing with the results of us not doing our job the first time because of political correctness. Now, if you don't like that, you can vote against me in the next election.

The lesson for the church is this. Pet sins can become uncontrollable monsters if you don't deal with them. Pet sins can become uncontrollable monsters if you don't deal with them.

And so let's look at these three towns. First of all, the problem of Gaza. The name Gaza means the strong place, the strong place.

And I want you to turn, if you would, to Judges 14-16. Judges 14-16. And I'm going to give you some characteristics here, and you may want to write these down.

But the name Gaza means the strong place. In Judges 14-16, we meet a judge named Samson. The name Samson means the strong man.

And Samson judged Israel for 20 years, but boy, he made a wreck of it, didn't he? We do not remember Samson as a great man of integrity and character and morals. We remember Samson as a failure. Now, Samson had three characteristics that he was supposed to live up to.

These are found in Numbers chapter 6. Numbers chapter 6 tells us... You don't have to turn there. Numbers chapter 6 tells us that there were three essential characteristics of a Nazarite. And Samson was a Nazarite.

First one is they could eat nothing from the vine. They could eat nothing from the vine. They couldn't eat grapes or juice or anything.

They were on some nothing-of-the-vine diet that you could buy at books a million. They could eat nothing from the vine. Secondly, their hair was to never be cut or shaved.

Judges chapter 13 in verse 5, the angel said to Samson's mother, no razor shall come on his head. And number three, they could never come near a dead body. So they could drink nothing from the vine.

They were to never cut their hair or be shaved. And they could never come in contact with a dead body. Samson pushed aside every one of these requirements to fulfill his fleshly desires.

Now let's look at them. Judges chapter 14 in verses 5 through 9, he deliberately approached the carcass of a dead lion. Deliberately did it.

Chose to do it. What was the vow? Don't touch, don't come near a dead body. He goes near and touches a dead lion.

In chapter 14 in verse 5, he was drinking the fruit of the vine. Wasn't supposed to do that. So he's already broken in just these few verses.

We don't know what the time span is here. But he's already broken two of these Nazarite vows. In Judges 16 in verse 1, look at Judges 16 and 1 because we're going to look at Gaza, how this affected Samson.

Now Samson went to Gaza and saw a harlot there and went into her. Now mark it somewhere in your Bible. Lust took the strong man to the strong place and defeated him.

Lust took the strong man to the strong place and defeated him. Samson went in and he went to Gaza. Remember, that was one of the places that they didn't destroy.

And so he goes in and who does he find there? He finds a harlot. And in Gaza there are enemies of God plotting to kill Samson. And the lords of Philistines promised Delilah 1,100 pieces of silver for his capture.

And so Delilah begins to woo and whine and pout and play tricks on Samson and finally he tells her the source of his strength. And now he's down to breaking the last of the Nazarite vows. The visible sign that he was a man set aside by God.

He had never cut his hair. He had never shaved. And he said the strength is in my hair.

And Delilah shaved off his hair and the strong place overtook him. Look at chapter 16 and verse 20. She said, The Philistines are upon you, Samson.

And he awoke from his sleep and said, I will go out as at other times and shake myself free. But he did not know that the Lord had departed him. Folks, listen.

Areas of our lives with Samson it was lust. With us it could be anything. Areas of our lives that are not dealt with and addressed.

There comes a point when we say I'll get up and I'll just be the Christian I've always been. And you'll not know that the Lord's taken his hand off of you. There won't be an announcement.

No angel's going to show up and write it in the sky. And say, oh by the way, God's taken his hand of blessing off of your life. You may not know it, but there will come a day when that area in your life left unchecked will begin to dominate you and however strong you think you are to be able to handle it, it will defeat you.

And you will be defeated and ashamed. Samson's testimony is in the Bible and his testimony is tainted 3,500 years after he lived. We still talk about Samson and his failures.

He was captured. Israel lost their leader. They were overthrown.

And Gaza became a place of humiliation and defeat. Why? An area undealt with in the life. Secondly, the problem of Gath.

I'll turn if you would to 1 Samuel 17. The problem of Gath. 1 Samuel 17 is a very familiar story.

It's a story of defeat and fear from the time the Philistines had a giant named Goliath. I want you to look. I mean when I saw this I just kind of went, this is, I mean God is incredibly smart and I'm just really dumb.

The problem of Gath. Chapter 17 of 1 Samuel and verse 4. Goliath of Gath. The city that should have been destroyed.

That should have been dealt with but they went around it. And because Gath wasn't dealt with here we are generations later and Goliath is wreaking havoc and building fear into the lives of God's people. John Hunter says this.

In Joshua's day, one man strong in the strength of God could have dealt with the entire city. Now in Goliath's day, one man of Gath was able to deal with the entire nation. Mark it down.

Compromise always results in a reversal of power. When we compromise, the devil gets power. And our flesh gets power.

And the Spirit of God doesn't have the power in our lives that He is supposed to have. And compromise reverses power and where you could be walking in power and walking in victory and walking in the fullness of God, now you walk in defeat and in fear and that's exactly what happened. They were scared to death.

Here was Goliath. Goliath would come out every day and taunt the armies of Israel. And Saul and the nation were afraid.

Here's Saul, the biggest man in all of Israel. He was the WWF wrestler. He was the guy.

But now he's a chicken. He's a coward. He's living in fear.

And in verse 11, it says this went on for 40 days. Every day, Goliath would come down and throw out the gauntlet. And the nation became brainwashed and they were bombarded.

And they said, we can't defeat this man. Look at verses 8-10. Give me a man that we may fight together.

Now I love this passage because it's almost as if if you just read between the lines, it's almost as if God says, I'll take that challenge. And He doesn't tap Saul on the shoulder. He goes out and finds a little runt shepherd boy named David who has been in his presence, who has been secretly anointed by Samuel, who has been listening to God and walking with God.

And so David shows up one day, brings his brothers a happy meal that's supersized. He wants to know what's going on. He finds out about it.

And God speaks to David's heart and says, David, you're the man. David walks out there and you know the whole story about the armor. He says, I can't wear Saul's armor.

You know all that. But here's this whole army and asking for one man and nobody will go. The army saw the giant.

David saw God. The army saw this huge obstacle. David saw that there was a big God on his side.

Now just like the ten spies and the two, David and the army now see the same thing but they come to different conclusions. David's conclusion is, I can't lose. The army's conclusion was, we can't win.

Isn't that exactly what happened to the people when they were getting ready to take the promised land? We can't win. And if the devil can ever get you convinced that you can't win, you can't win. But if you keep your eyes on God and walk with Him, then you will find out that here's the difference, folks.

Here's the difference. People come to me and they say, I have this problem and I can't get over it. I have this problem and I can't get over it.

And there's somebody else who will come and say, I've got this problem and it's the same problem as this person over here. And I mean cold turkey. I mean they can just walk out of it and victory.

I've come to the conclusion that the difference is the size of your God. It's not the size of your problem. The difference is the size of your God.

If you have a big God, then no problem is too big for Him. If you have a little God, then every problem is too big for Him. It's all about the size of your God.

Look at verse 34, chapter 17. We're going to read a little bit here. But David said to Saul, Your servant was tending his father's sheep when a lion or a bear came and took a lamb from the flock.

And I went out after him and attacked him and rescued it from his mouth. And when he rose up against me, I seized him by his beard and struck him and killed him. Your servant has killed both the lion and the bear.

And this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them since he has taunted the armies of the living God. And David said, The Lord who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear, He will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine. Verse 42, When the Philistine looked and saw David, he disdained him for he was but a youth and ruddy with a handsome appearance.

The Philistine said to David, Am I a dog that you come to me with sticks? And the Philistine cursed David by his gods. And the Philistine also said to David, Come to me and I will give you your flesh to the birds of the sky and the beasts of the field. Then David said to the Philistine, You come to me with a sword and a spear and a javelin, but I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel whom you have taunted.

You see what David says, You're not taunting God's people, you're taunting God. You're not messing with us, you're messing with God. You've already, you've fought the wrong battle, big boy, and you think you're big, but I've got a heavenly Father that's going to lay you to waste.

That's what he's telling him. And this day, verse 46, This day the Lord will deliver you up into my hands and I will strike you down and remove your head from you. And I will give the dead bodies of the army of the Philistines this day to the birds of the sky and the wild beasts of the earth that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel.

And that all this assembly may know, all these people who are cowards, all these people who have been quivering for 40 days, fearful of Goliath, that all this assembly may know that the Lord does not deliver by sword or by spear, for the battle is the Lord's and he will give you into our hands. Listen, the man who walks with God can make bold statements for God. When you walk with God, you can make bold statements for God.

And that's exactly what David did. David had a weapon that Goliath couldn't see, the name of the Lord of hosts. Verse 47, You'll be delivered into our hands.

David wasn't even going to take credit for it. I think we've talked about this before, but you know, why did David take five stones? Well, because David had, Goliath had four brothers. He figured if one of them showed up, they got mad because he got Goliath, they might jump in the back of their pickup truck and drive on over and try to have a whooping.

So he said, well, I got a stone for each of the brothers just in case they show up. But you see, just killing Goliath put the army to flight. Here's David, who is standing in the sufficiency of the resources that God gave him, on the authority of the Word of God, on the authority of the name of the Lord of hosts, and he wins the battle.

But here's Goliath, who's from Gath, one of those towns that hadn't been defeated, and it comes back up and it bites them. But listen, somewhere by this passage in 1 Samuel, 1 Corinthians 15, 57, thanks be to God who gives us victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Folks, we don't have to bow to anything the devil throws our way.

I'm not trying to be mystical about that. I'm not saying it's name it, claim it, but I'm telling you that when you stand on the authority of God's Word, the devil doesn't have any ground to fight you on. Number three, the problem of Ashdod.

The problem of Ashdod. Now, if you'll... I don't know if this is in your... Is it in your notes a little fill-in-the-blank here for the three things? Is it? Okay. The problem of Ashdod.

Just track with me here. First of all, Gaza is the place of defeat. And there are Christians who even could have come through a time like refresh, and there'll be an area in your life that you don't deal with, and it brings defeat.

Gath was a place of defiance. A place of defiance. And there will be an attack on you.

Somebody will confront, attack you, defy you, for whatever reason, challenge you, to try to get you on your heels, to try to get you to live in fear. And then there's Ashdod, which is a place of defilement. A place of defilement.

Now, 1 Samuel 4 records the failed attempts of Israel to overcome the Philistines at Ebenezer. And in the first attack, they lost 4,000 men. Eli was a priest, and his sons were priests, but they were ungodly men.

1 Samuel 2, verse 12 says, his sons knew not the Lord. And so I want you to look at 1 Samuel chapter 4. 1 Samuel chapter 4, because I want you to see, here they are trying to overcome the Philistines. And you're going to see how Ashdod fits in in just a moment.

1 Samuel 4. Now, here's where the elders and the leaders gave ungodly advice. Let us take to ourselves from Shiloh the ark of the covenant of the Lord, that it may come among us and deliver us from the power of our enemies. So the people sent to Shiloh, and from there they carried the ark of the covenant of the Lord of hosts, who sits above the cherubim.

And the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were there with the ark of the covenant of God. Now, here's what they were doing. They were taking the ark of the covenant of God, the presence of God, and they were treating it like a magic wand.

Like some kind of little magic item. Oh, we'll get this, and with this, and this, and this, and this. Boo! We've got you.

We've got the ark of the covenant. We can scare you off. Verse 5. As the ark of the covenant of the Lord came into the camp, all Israel shouted with a great shout so that the earth resounded.

And when the Philistines heard the noise of the shout, they said, what does the noise of this great shout in the camp of the Hebrews mean? Then they understood that the ark of the Lord had come into the camp. And the Philistines were afraid, for they said, God has come into the camp. You see, even the pagans know when God shows up.

God has come into the camp. And they said, Woe to us! For nothing like this has ever happened before. Woe to us! Who shall deliver us from the hand of these mighty gods? These are the gods who smoke the Egyptians with all kinds of plagues in the wilderness.

Take courage and be men, O Philistines, or you will become slaves to the Hebrews as they have been slaves to you. Therefore, be men and fight. So the Philistines fought, and Israel was defeated, and every man fled to his tent.

And the slaughter was very great, and there fell of Israel thirty thousand foot soldiers. And the ark of God was taken, and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, died. Chapter 5. Now the Philistines took the

ark of God and brought it from Ebenezer to Ashdod.

There's your reference. Then the Philistines took the ark of God. Now remember, they're in Ashdod.

This is the place that should have been destroyed. This is the place that should have been dealt with. And the Philistines took the ark of God and brought it to the house of Dagon and set it by Dagon.

Ebenezer means up to this point, God has helped us. Ashdod means fortress. They took the ark and placed it in a vile, heathen temple fortress to a false god, Dagon.

They stole the ark of the covenant, which symbolized the presence of God among His people, and they took it and put it before a vile God. Now if you read this, Dagon was toppled by the judgment of God, but not before. The name of God was defiled by the acts of the people of Israel.

They should have never brought that ark out. God didn't tell them to do that. And they defiled and defamed the name of God by their unprayed over, unwise, ungodly act of bringing it out and treating God as if He's some kind of magic wand that you can kind of make Him do whatever you want Him to do.

And they defiled Him. And Ashdod shows up again in Nehemiah. It was those from Ashdod who resisted the work of God when Nehemiah was doing that.

Nehemiah 13, 23, and 24. Now this is really interesting. It's like we never learn.

Those who fail to remember history, repeat it. We never get it. In Nehemiah 13, 23, and 24, it says the Jews were marrying the women of Ashdod, and the people of God were defiled, and a generation grew up that could not speak Hebrew.

Here were God's people, God's chosen people, set aside to be unique, set apart to be the people of God, set apart to be a witness to the nations. And they couldn't even speak the language of God. They couldn't speak Hebrew.

They couldn't read the Scriptures. They couldn't understand anything God was saying. Why? Because they left a little town undetected, and they left it and just said, ah, we're not going to worry with that.

It's just a small little place. And here they are, centuries later, and they're dealing with Ashdod. And the Ark of the Covenant has been put before a false heathen God.

And the name of God has been defiled. And now, if that's not enough, you go down the road to Nehemiah, and here are their children that are intermarrying with these false people who worship false gods, and they don't even speak Hebrew, and the language of Ashdod, the language of defilement was the language of the people of God. I will repeat what I said sometime before, refresh.

A compromise today is a character trait tomorrow. And what we do in moderation, our children will do in excess. Folks, don't think for one minute, for one minute, that we can ignore the little insignificant areas of our life and think, oh man, I'm doing so good.

I'm at rest from war. Don't ever think for one minute that that area is not going to come back and get you because it will. And in our lives tonight, there could be a little area, a little city, a little sin, a little compromise, a little oh no big deal, but somewhere down the road, if we don't address it, it's going to come back and it's going to hurt us.

And we won't finish well. And we will just be another statistic in the casualty list of believers who didn't keep their focus on God. Let's pray together.

We're not going to sing a song of invitation tonight. We're just simply going to have a few moments where we can pray and seek the Lord. There is no such thing as a little

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