

THE ARK WAS CAPTURED

1 SAMUEL 4-6



KEY PASSAGE: Philippians 4:19

BIG PICTURE QUESTION: How does God care for His creation? God loves and rules over His creation according to His perfect plan.

CHRIST CONNECTION: God is holy and punished the Israelites and Philistines for misusing the ark. All people sin and deserve God's judgment, but Jesus took that judgment when He died on the cross. All who trust in Jesus are forgiven of sin and saved from judgment.

STORY POINT: The Israelites misused the ark, but God still displayed His power.



PREPARE

PRIOR TO TEACHING THE SESSION

LEADER Bible Study

The Philistines' capture of the ark of the covenant reveals the folly of seeking God's blessing over God Himself. The Israelites realized they were no match for the Philistines, so they pursued worldly wisdom instead of seeking God in prayer. Reducing the significance of the ark to a good luck charm set off a chain reaction of disastrous events. Yet, God provided His people a victory they did not deserve.

What was the significance of the ark? How does the Lord prove His might against false gods and among the nations of the world?

The ark served as a reminder of God's promise to dwell among His people. Inside it was some manna from heaven, Aaron's rod, and the tablets of the Ten Commandments. Each item demonstrated God's provision, as well as His covenant promise to remain with them through the ages. 1 Samuel 4:5 tells us that when the Israelites entered the camp with the ark, their shouts were loud enough to shake the ground. These shouts, however, were empty praise not fueled by a right view of the Lord or His righteous cause among the nations.

God responded to the Israelites' sin by allowing the Philistines to capture the ark that represented His presence and glory among God's people. Yet, God used what looked outwardly like defeat to bring glory to His name by demonstrating His power over the enemy and His judgment of sin. This foreshadowed an even greater story of God claiming glory through what looked like defeat—when Jesus allowed Himself to be captured by people and crucified to satisfy God's judgment on sin. Likewise, the surprising return of the ark by the unmistakable power of the Lord foreshadowed Christ's resurrection to be with His people.

Lead boys and girls to see that the source of our hope lies not in our wishes of good fortune from the Lord, but rather in the salvation secured by Christ through faith in His name. Like the Israelites, we deserve judgment for our sin. By faith in Christ, however, we receive forgiveness and His righteousness. Pray for boys and girls to see the weight of their sins and the price Christ paid to secure them as His own forever.



PREPARE

THE WEEK PRIOR

Prepare your heart to teach; plan the session



WELCOME

10-15 MINUTES

Greet kids and open the session



LEARN

25-30 MINUTES

Teach kids the story of the gospel



LOVE

15-20 MINUTES

Lead kids to love the God of the gospel



LIVE

15-20 MINUTES

Lead kids to live out the mission of the gospel



PREPARE

PRIOR TO TEACHING THE SESSION

GATHER Supplies

Keep a regular supply of the following items available at all times: Bibles, pens or pencils, markers, crayons, colored pencils, scissors, glue or tape, paper.



WELCOME

Activity Page

- ☐ "Label the Ark" activity page

Session Starter (Option 1)

- ☐ plastic cups, 1 per kid

Session Starter (Option 2)

- ☐ dry erase board and marker



LOVE

Review & Bible Skills

- ☐ Small Group Timeline and Map Set
- ☐ world map



LIVE

Activity Choice (Option 1)

- ☐ items such as a hair dryer, a flashlight, and a helium-filled balloon

Journal and Prayer

- ☐ Journal Page
- ☐ "Grid It" activity page



LEARN

Introduce the Session

- ☐ countdown video
- ☐ Story Point Poster

Big Picture Question

- ☐ Big Picture Question Poster

Review the Timeline

- ☐ Giant Timeline

Tell the Bible Story

- ☐ "The Ark Was Captured" video
- ☐ Bible Story Picture Poster

Questions from Kids

- ☐ "Unit 9, Session 3" Questions from Kids video

Key Passage Activity

- ☐ Key Passage Poster
- ☐ "My God (Philippians 4:19)" song
- ☐ worship song of your choice (optional)
- ☐ ball



WELCOME Kids

Greet each kid as he or she arrives. Use this time to collect the offering, fill out attendance sheets, build relationships, and help new kids connect to your group.

SAY “Have you ever lost something important to you? What was it? How did you feel when you lost it?”

1 ACTIVITY PAGE (5 minutes)

Invite kids to complete “Label the Ark” activity page.

SAY “The ark of the covenant represented God’s presence with the people and contained the stone tablets with the Ten Commandments. Today, we will see how the people of God misused the ark.”

2 SESSION STARTER (10 minutes)

☐ OPTION 1: FLIP THE CUP

Form kids into two teams and instruct each team to sit at a table. Provide each kid with a plastic cup and tell them to place the cup upside down on the table. Challenge teams to flip their cups right side up by letting the lip of the cup slightly hang over the edge of the table while they use their fingers to flip the cup so it stands right side up. The first team to have every kid flip their cup wins.

SAY “We wouldn’t be using a cup properly if we tried to drink from it while it was upside down. It needs to be placed in the proper position to be filled with liquid to drink. In today’s story, God’s people were not treating the ark of the covenant properly. The ark represented God’s presence among His people, and it was to be treated as holy. We’ll see that **THE ISRAELITES MISUSED THE ARK, BUT GOD STILL DISPLAYED HIS POWER.**”

☐ OPTION 2: GREATEST VALUE



On a dry erase board, write the following items: smartphone, soccer ball, bicycle, can of beans, movie ticket, gallon of milk, 1 lb of gold. Provide each kid with a piece of paper and a pen. Tell kids to think about the average value of each item. Then challenge kids to list the items in order from greatest value to least.

(Answers based on rough estimates: \$29,000 for 1 lb of gold, \$790 for a smartphone, \$308 for a bicycle, \$20 for a soccer ball, \$10.53 for a movie ticket, \$4.03 for a gallon of milk, \$1.69 for a can of beans)

SAY “One pound of gold was the most valuable item on the list. Did you know that the ark of the covenant was overlaid with pure gold? If the ark represented God’s presence, it would make sense to decorate it with something valuable. God is most valuable because He is holy. We are sinners, but He is perfect. Today, we will see how Israel didn’t treat God as most valuable.”





INTRODUCE the Bible Story

1 INTRODUCE THE SESSION (3 minutes)

Show the countdown video as you transition to introduce the Bible story. Set it to end as the session begins.

SAY “Hi, kids! My name is [your name], and I am glad you’re here to learn more about our great God. Did you know that God is holy? This means that God’s character is unique and separate from what He created. He is morally perfect—He never sins—and He is infinitely greater than us in every way. Today, in 1 Samuel, we’ll see how the people did not treat God as holy when they misused the ark of the covenant. [Distribute Bibles to kids who need one.]

In our story, we’ll see that **THE ISRAELITES MISUSED THE ARK, BUT GOD STILL DISPLAYED HIS POWER.** [Display the Story Point Poster.] Let’s pray: ‘Dear heavenly Father, You are holy and deserve all the praise. Give us hearts that value You as the only One worthy of our worship. Amen.’ ”

2 BIG PICTURE QUESTION (1 minute)

Display the Big Picture Question Poster.

SAY “How does God care for His creation? What was the answer? [Allow responses.] **God loves and rules over His creation according to His perfect plan.** Let’s say the answer again. [Repeat the big picture answer.]

As we read our story, we’ll see how God’s people sinned against Him. But God rules over everything, and His power overcame their sinful choices. God also displayed His power to overcome our sin. Through His perfect plan, God provided Jesus to take the punishment our sin requires, and by His power, raised Jesus back to life. ”

3 REVIEW THE TIMELINE (1 minute)

Show the Giant Timeline. Point to individual Bible stories as you review.

SAY “Over the past weeks, we have learned how God cared for His people. We saw how God provided a redeemer for Ruth and were reminded how God provided His Son, Jesus, as the Redeemer for everyone who trusts in Him. Last week, we saw how God provided for Hannah and gave her a son, Samuel. We learned God called Samuel to be a prophet who spoke God’s words, and how God sent Jesus to be the Word made flesh. Today, we will see how God’s people misused the ark, but God was faithful to display His power so the ark could be returned to Israel. ”



LEARN the Bible Story

1 TELL THE BIBLE STORY: VIDEO OR STORYTELLER (10 minutes)

Open your Bible to 1 Samuel 4:1-11; 5; 6:1-12. Use the Bible storytelling tips to help you tell the story, or show the Bible story video “The Ark Was Captured.” Use the bold text to retell or review the story.

THE ARK WAS CAPTURED

“One day, Israel was defeated in battle against their enemies, the Philistines. When they returned to the camp, they had an idea: “Let’s bring the ark of the LORD’s covenant from Shiloh. Then we will win!”

The ark represented God’s presence with His people. The Israelites thought the ark of the covenant would help them win against the Philistines.

When the Israelites went to battle with the Philistines again, the Israelites were defeated. The Philistines captured the ark, and Hophni and Phineas died. When Eli heard how the Philistines took the ark, he fell over backward out of his chair and died.

The Philistines took the ark of the Lord and brought it into the temple of a false god they worshiped named Dagon. When they woke up the next day and went into their temple, they found the statue of Dagon fallen over, face down before the ark of the Lord. They put the statue back upright in its place. But the next morning, they again found the statue of Dagon fallen over, but this time the statue’s head and hands were broken off.

God acted against the Philistines. He punished them with tumors, and the Philistines were terrified. They decided to move the ark to a different Philistine city. But God acted against the people in that city. Then the Philistines moved the ark a third time, but God continued to punish the Philistines. **Finally, they decided to send the ark back to Israel.**

The Philistines placed the ark on a cart attached to two young cows that had never pulled anything before. They also placed gold gifts in the cart as a guilt offering to the Lord. The cows traveled up the road to the Israelites. The ark of the Lord was back home with the people of God.

Christ Connection: God is holy and punished the Israelites and Philistines for misusing the ark. All people sin and deserve God’s judgment, but Jesus took that judgment when He died on the cross. All who trust in Jesus are forgiven of sin and saved from judgment. ”

STORYTELLING TIPS

Make sounds: Invite kids to make sounds for specific points in the story such as “oh no!” when the ark was captured or “ahh!” when the statue of Dagon fell over or “moo” when the cows traveled up the road.

Remind kids: Remind kids that Eli’s sons were wicked priests who did not follow God’s commands. Tell kids they took advantage of their status as priests rather than lead the people in truth.



THE STORY OF THE GOSPEL

2 REVIEW THE BIBLE STORY

SAY “ The Israelites thought they knew how to have victory over the Philistines. They believed if they had the ark of the covenant, they would have power to defeat their enemies. However, God did not tell them to move the ark of the covenant. What happened as a consequence to their disobedience? Look at 1 Samuel 4:11. **[Choose a volunteer to read 1 Samuel 4:11 aloud.]** The ark did not have any power on its own. It was up to God whether or not the Israelites would win. God allowed the ark to be captured by the Philistines. Israel treated God’s presence like a good luck charm rather than honoring Him as holy.

THE ISRAELITES MISUSED THE ARK, BUT GOD STILL DISPLAYED HIS POWER. How did God display His power? Look at 1 Samuel 5:3-6. **[Choose a volunteer to read 1 Samuel 5:3-6 aloud.]** Even though the misuse of the ark led to it being captured, God showed His power against the Philistines as the faithful and one true God of His people Israel. He caused the idol Dagon to fall down and be broken. He also punished the Philistine people with tumors. When the Philistines moved the ark to different cities, God continued to show His power and presence.

Finally, the Philistines decided to send the ark back to God’s people. How did God again show His power through the Philistines’ plan to send the ark on a cart with cows? Look at 1 Samuel 6:9,12. **[Choose a volunteer to read 1 Samuel 6:9,12 aloud.]** The cows had never traveled to the Israelites’ town of Beth-shemesh, yet God directed the cows’ steps to His people. God showed His faithfulness to His people and that He would continue to be with them.

God is holy and punished the Israelites and Philistines for misusing the ark. All people sin and deserve God’s judgment, but Jesus took that judgment when He died on the cross. All who trust in Jesus are forgiven of sin and saved from judgment. ”

3 GOSPEL DISCUSSION

SAY “ God is holy and will one day judge all people. Only those who have trusted in Jesus will escape the punishment of sin. If you have questions about what it means to place your faith in Jesus as your Savior and Lord, I would love to continue talking with you. ”

(Tip: Use Scripture and the Gospel Plan Poster to explain how to become a Christian. Create an environment where kids are welcome to ask questions about what it means to follow Jesus.)

4 QUESTIONS FROM KIDS (3 minutes)

Show the “Unit 9, Session 3” Questions from Kids video. Prompt kids to discuss:

1. Why does Jesus love us, even when we have sinned?
2. How can we show we love Jesus?



LEARN

THE STORY OF THE GOSPEL

5 MISSIONS MOMENT (3 minutes)

SAY “ Doug and Evelyn Knapp were missionaries in Tanzania, Africa. They worked to share the gospel with the Nyakyusa (NYE ak oo sa) people. But before the Knapps could share the gospel with the Nyakyusa people, the Knapps needed to gain their trust. Doug and Evelyn showed kindness to the people and gave away seed packets so the people could grow food. One day, a farmer asked Doug why he was so kind to the people. This gave Doug an opportunity to tell the man about Jesus. The man trusted in Jesus, and the door was opened to share the gospel with many more people. ”

Tell kids that more than 49,000 baptisms occurred during the missionaries’ final 11 years of service on the field. Discuss how the missionaries were faithful to share the gospel, but God is the One who saved those who trusted in Jesus. Remind kids that victory over sin comes from God alone, who provided Jesus to save people. Pray that God would continue to save people from all over the world.

6 KEY PASSAGE ACTIVITY (5 minutes)

Show the Key Passage Poster. Lead kids in reading aloud Philippians 4:19 together.

SAY “ Even though God’s people misused the ark, God displayed His glory through His powerful judgments. God has also displayed His power to provide our need of salvation through His Son, Jesus. Jesus saves us from our sin when we trust in Him. ”

Toss a ball to a kid and direct him to say the first word of the key passage. Then lead him to toss the ball to another kid who will say the next word. Continue until the entire key passage is said. If time permits, repeat the activity, but direct kids to say two words when they catch the ball.

Lead kids to sing “My God (Philippians 4:19).” You may also choose to sing a worship song of your choice.

7 PRAY (2 minutes)

Invite kids to pray before transitioning to Love.

SAY “ Dear God, thank You for sending Jesus to save us from the judgment our sin deserves. We praise You for Your power to save. In Jesus’ name, amen. ”

Transition from **LEARN** to **LOVE**





THE GOD OF THE GOSPEL

LOVE God by Applying the Story

1 REVIEW & BIBLE SKILLS (5 minutes)

Distribute Bibles and display the Old Testament Kingdoms Map. Guide kids to open their Bibles to 1 Samuel 6. Explain that the Philistines in today's story lived in the region of Philistia, along the coast of the Mediterranean Sea. Point out Gaza (I1), which was a city in Philistia.

Consider comparing the map to a modern-day map to help kids understand where these stories took place. (Tip: Locate Gaza in and around modern-day Palestine.) Choose a volunteer to read aloud 1 Samuel 6:6-7 or ask the kids to follow along as you read the verses aloud.

SAY “ Even though the idol-worshipping priests did not worship God, they did have a right response by recognizing that it was God’s power that was afflicting them. They obviously had heard of all God had done to the Egyptians and did not want the same fate as them, which was death. The idol-worshipping priests warned the people not to have hard hearts.

We must be careful to not harden our hearts against sin’s deceitfulness. When we sin, the right response is to turn to Jesus and repent. God is merciful when we acknowledge His holiness and seek forgiveness through faith in Jesus. ”

2 GROUP DISCUSSION (10 minutes)

Ask the following questions. Lead the group to discuss.

SAY “ How did God’s people misuse the ark? ”

Remind kids that God’s people treated the ark like a “good-luck charm.” The people were only using God to get what they wanted. The ark did not have any special powers. It was a reminder of God’s presence with His people. God alone had the power to give the Israelites victory. (Option: Choose a volunteer to read 1 Chron. 29:12-13.)

SAY “ How does this story show us that God takes sin seriously? ”

Help kids recall how God allowed the Philistines to capture the ark because His people sinned against Him when they misused the ark. Discuss how God punished the Philistines for their sin. Remind kids that God is holy, and He will not leave sin unpunished. Tell kids that Jesus took the punishment of sin in our place. (Option: Choose a volunteer to read Rom. 2:6-8.)

SAY “ How did God show the Philistines that He is the one true God? ”

Discuss how even though the Philistines had captured the ark of the Lord, they had no power over God. Remind kids of how God destroyed the statue of Dagon, afflicted the people with tumors, and caused the cows to know the right way to go. (Option: Choose a volunteer to read Isa. 44:6.)

Transition from **LOVE** to **LIVE**





THE STORY OF THE GOSPEL

LIVE the Mission

1 ACTIVITY CHOICE (10 minutes)

☐ OPTION 1: WHO'S GOT THE POWER?

Before the session, bring in a few items such as a hair dryer, a flashlight, and a helium filled balloon. Hold up each item one at a time and ask kids what is the source of power for each item. Plug the hair dryer into an outlet and turn it on to demonstrate electrical power. Turn on a battery-operated flashlight to show how the batteries supply the power. Then let go of a helium filled balloon to show how the gas gives the balloon power to rise. Discuss how each item had no power without a power source.

SAY “ The ark of the covenant had no power on its own. **THE ISRAELITES MISUSED THE ARK, BUT GOD STILL DISPLAYED HIS POWER.** God showed Israel and the Philistines that He is the one true God. In our own efforts, we could never have the power to remove our sin, just like the Israelites had no power to defeat the Philistines. But when we trust in Jesus, God’s power lives in us through the Holy Spirit. We can live in ways that please God and point others to Jesus. ”

☐ OPTION 2: SAY IT FIRST



Remind kids that **God loves and rules over His creation according to His perfect plan.** Tell kids that God’s perfect plan is revealed to us in the Bible through His Son, Jesus. Explain that knowing God’s Word helps us see how He displayed His power through Jesus to save people from sin.

Form kids into two lines. Call out a letter that correlates to a book of the Bible. For example, “A” could be Acts or Amos. Tell kids that when they hear the letter, they must say a book of the Bible. The first kid to do so receives a point for their team. Send kids to the back of the line, and repeat with the next two kids. The team with the most points wins.

SAY “ God is holy and punished the Israelites and Philistines for misusing the ark. All people sin and deserve God’s judgment, but the Bible tells us that Jesus took that judgment when He died on the cross. All who trust in Jesus are forgiven of sin and saved from judgment. ”

2 JOURNAL AND PRAYER (5 minutes)

Distribute journal pages and pencils. Guide kids to think about and answer the questions listed on the page. As kids journal, invite them to share their ideas.

- What does this story teach me about God or the gospel?
- What does the story teach me about myself?
- Are there any commands in this story to obey? How are they for God’s glory and my good?
- Are there promises in this story to remember? How do they help me trust and love God?
- How does this story help me to live on mission better?

Review the gospel and encourage kids to speak with you or another teacher if they have questions. Then pray, thanking God for His great power to save people through His Son, Jesus. As time allows, lead kids to complete “Grid It” on the activity page.