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First Samuel has some famous stories that are usually well known to Christians, especially the stories about King David. However, David does not appear until the 16<sup>th</sup> chapter of First Samuel. What happens in the first 15 chapters?

We learn about Samuel the prophet. His mother was unable to conceive children, but she prayed to the Lord and he granted her a child. In return, she dedicated Samuel to the Lord's service.

By this time, the priests of Israel were very corrupt. Eli, the high priest, had two wicked sons. They stole from faithful people, threatened anyone who argued with them, and abused women who came to worship the Lord. Their father Eli didn't even try to stop them.

God decided it was time for a fresh start. God spoke directly to Samuel. God did *not* speak directly to Eli or his sons. Samuel is remembered and honored because of the amazing fact that God spoke directly to him.

This is important, because often we think that God spoke all the time in ancient history, but in our day God is silent. However, even in ancient times, people knew that direct words from God were extremely rare. Most people back then lived the same kind of lives we live now. They worshiped, they prayed, they hoped, they tried to keep God's law, and they remembered the great things that God had done for his people in the past. But, unlike Samuel, they almost never heard God's words direct in their ears.

First Samuel tells another amazing story. At this time, the Israelites kept the Ten Commandments in a box called "the ark of the covenant." God's presence on earth was in the ark.

During this time, the Israelites had many battles with the Philistines. In one terrible battle, the Philistines stole the ark of the covenant. They brought the ark to the temple of their own false god. The Philistines thought the God of Israel would serve and obey the God of the Philistines.

Actually, the Israelites thought the same! They thought that whoever controlled the ark controlled God. Israel was in complete despair. They lost their God. Their God was humiliated. The glory of God had disappeared.

But both the Philistines and the Israelites were wrong. They thought the ark depended on human armies. But the ark depended only on God. God *allowed* the ark to be caught. God allowed the ark to be taken to the Philistine temple. The ark defeated the Philistine false god! The statue fell over, and its head and hands broke off. The Philistines were so frightened that they actually sent the ark back to Israel.

It's a strange story. But actually, it's the same story as Jesus, who was the presence of God on earth, too. Jesus allowed himself to be caught by Judas, the high priests, and the Roman army. Jesus allowed himself to be crucified and killed. Jesus allowed himself to be lost and humiliated.

But, like the ark, Jesus did not stay lost and humiliated. Like the ark, Jesus had victory over sin, death, and the devil. Jesus came out of the tomb, alive again, on Easter morning.

The Old Testament and the New Testament tell the same story about God!