I. Intro

*A. *I need to correct something I said a few weeks back**

1. I said Ruth was out of order chronologically, and it took place during the exile

2. That was incorrect; I was confusing Esther with Ruth

3. Ruth takes place during Judges, and Esther takes place during the exile

B. We finished Judges last week

1. Israel wandered from God, and their tribes were isolated
2. Everyone did what they thought was right
3. That is a sin, but it also leads to other unintended sins

C. When you reshape God into a new religion, you see patterns that don't exist

1. For example:
   a) You lose a ring, you pray to St. Anthony and find it = praying to saints works
   b) Life is rough, you go to church, things change = going to church works
   c) You pray before a game, your team wins = God cares about your sports team
2. These are called superstitions, and they come from reshaping God
   a) They lie to you about God's power
   b) They give you a false sense of control

D. Superstition is the religion of Israel by the end of Judges/beginning of 1 Samuel

1. This is the world Samuel was born into and grew up in
2. Samuel studied under Eli, the current judge/priest
3. God called Samuel out of this world and made him a voice of repentance

E. Samuel stands between the tribal superstitions of Israel and the coming monarchy

1. He was a voice of repentance, and God used him in big ways
2. We are going to study his life for the next month in this series "The Life of Samuel"
3. We are doing this because his world looks similar to our world
   a) Lots of change all around us, happening very quickly
   b) Many people living off superstitions
4. Jesus is our better Samuel, and He is preaching a message of repentance
   a) We should echo that message and stay firmly planted in truth, not superstition

F. Let's begin our series in 1 Samuel 4

1. Samuel is a young man, preaching all through Israel
2. Meanwhile, Israel has a new enemy named the Philistines
3. To defeat the Philistines, Israel resorts to superstition
4. This story reinforces the heart condition of Israel, and it sets the stage for change

II. Text

A. 1 Samuel 4:1-4

1. Israel lost a ton of men against the Philistines in battle
   a) Instead of praying to God, they tried to manipulate His power
   b) They leveraged a superstition around the ark of the covenant
   c) They thought God's power was in the box and they tried to exploit it
   d) The box was a symbol that God was present, not the source of His power
2. We can live with a similar superstition:
   a) We can think we are the source of God's power, "He can't do anything unless I act, and if I don't I've ruined His plans"
   b) You are not the source of God's power; God is the source of your power
   c) God takes pleasure in using you, but He does not need you *(Acts 17:25)*
3. Israel built their theology on this lie, and it cost them greatly

B. 1 Samuel 4:5-11

1. Israel used the ark as a good luck charm, so God gave the victory to the Philistines
   a) Their defeat meant the death of 30,000 men and two priests,
   b) Their defeat meant the enemy stole the ark
2. Take a moment to learn this lesson:
   a) You can't manipulate God to get your way
   b) You can't use His name to manipulate others
   c) Doing either of these will leave you looking foolish and empty-handed

C. 1 Samuel 4:12-7:2

1. Eli heard his sons were dead and the ark was captured; he fell over dead
2. The Philistines took the ark home and put it in the temple with their god *(Dagon)*

3. The next morning, Dagon was bowing down to the ark
4. The following morning, Dagon was bowing down without a head or hands
5. The Philistines moved the ark from city to city, and people got sick with tumors
6. The Philistine priests told the leaders to send the ark back with an offering
    a) The offering was 5 golden tumors / 5 golden mice
    b) The idea was, a little of the poison will cure the disease
    c) Think vaccines, anti-venoms, and *the hair of the dog that bit you*
7. The Philistines returned the ark and Israel store it in Abinadab's house
    a) It stayed there for 20 years, and Israel had a real wake up call
    b) This situation brought Israel very low, and Samuel stepped in to preach

D. 1 Samuel 7:3-11

1. Samuel gathered the people at Mizpah and preached to them
    a) He said, "REPENT! Turn in your heart AND put away the idols!"
    b) These two aspects are fundamental to Samuel's message
    c) They had to clean their wrong way of thinking and their wrong way of acting
2. This sermon is echoed by John The Baptist 1,000 years later
    a) Repent AND bear fruit in keeping with repentance
    b) Don't stop at changing your habits, change what you think about
        (1) Philippians 4:8 *"whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things."*
    c) Repentance is a change of thinking AND a change of living
3. Israel responded to Samuel's message with an AMEN!
    a) They were immediately tested; the Philistines surrounded them to fight
    b) Israel looked to Samuel for leadership, and Samuel prayed
    c) God thundered from heaven, and Israel won the battle
4. This was a monumental day in Israel; things started to change on this day
    a) Samuel did not want Israel to forget what God did

E. Conclusion

1. 1 Samuel 7:12-17

a) To remind the people what God did, Samuel made a monument

(1) He built a memorial using a stone

(2) He called the stone "Stone of Help" which in Hebrew is "Ebenezer"

b) Picture this:

(1) In this midst of thousands of Hebrews…

(2) Samuel reminded them of God's faithfulness…

(3) By "raising his Ebenezer"

c) This story is why Robert Robinson wrote the line "Here I raise my Ebenezer" in the 1758 hymn, *Come thou fount of every blessing*

(1) Here I raise my Ebenezer, Hither by Thy help I'm come; And I hope, by Thy good pleasure, Safely to arrive at home. Jesus sought me when a stranger, Wandering from the fold of God; He, to rescue me from danger, Interposed His precious blood.

2. Living a life of repentance requires constant reminders

a) We are prone to wander from the fold of God

b) We have bad habits of reshaping God and leaning toward superstition

c) We need constant reminders of His faithfulness

d) We need to hear preaching like Samuel's message "Repent on the inside and outside"

e) And, we need to lift our Ebenezer *(the moments God helped)* as worship and thanksgiving