

Kingmaker: The Qualities of a Godly Influencer
The Twisted Mindset of Religion
1 Samuel 4

Introduction: Mindset is how we view God, others, ourselves and life in general, and as such, it completely predicts how we will experience the circumstances of life. Our mindset is literally what interprets our environment and dictates our attitudes and actions.

For instance, the most watched event every year in the United States is the Super Bowl. More than 100 million people typically tune in to watch it. Everything else is a distant second, but that doesn't mean everybody is going to experience it the same way. For instance:

- (1)** People whose mindset enjoys the game of football or athletic competition in general will be excited to watch the two best football teams in the world compete against each other. They will watch the game with significant interest in how each team attempts to win and will end up celebrating every highlight no matter who accomplishes it. This mindset hopes for a super close game that comes down to the final play.
- (2)** People who have a mindset that sports are stupid get annoyed by the Super Bowl. This mindset results in things like rolling their eyes at sports fans, questioning a person's love of Jesus if they get too excited about the game, or intentionally starting a massive home repair project right before the opening kickoff!
- (3)** People whose mindset is attached to the success of one of the teams competing in the Super Bowl will experience significantly increased levels of anxiety. The evidence of this mindset is often seen as they throw popcorn at the TV out of anger over a what they perceived to be a bad call by the referees. It's also demonstrated as a person confidently tells the coaches of their team what to do; the very coaches who are being paid large sums of money because they are the most experienced and successful football coaches in the world. Finally, this mindset unleashes a torrent of insults towards players who make mistakes, often describing them with words like, "your horrible," or "you stink;" the very players who are being paid millions of dollars to play in the game because they are literally not only the greatest football players in the world, but also some of the most elite athletes on the planet. Interestingly, if their team wins, all the horrible statements they made about their players and coaches during the game will be a forgotten memory, at least until the first game of the next season. However, if their team loses, they will find themselves vilifying the referees, suggesting the mafia influenced the outcome of the game, and possibly even demanding the team be sold to an owner that will hire coaches and players that know what they are doing.
- (4)** People whose mindset is to socialize with others will love the opportunity the Super Bowl presents them to get together with other people. However, the people with this mindset will ultimately become annoying to the people with mindsets (1) and (3)

because they will insist on talking about everything possible during the game, then suddenly get quiet and ask for the volume to be turned up during the commercials. It typically results in them being ignored by the people with mindsets (1) and (3) so they migrate over to the people who think sports are stupid and end up finding themselves helping with the home improvement project.

- (5) People whose mindset is their love of Taylor Swift will end up annoyed by all the TV coverage of the actual game and the athletes in the game instead of detailed up to date reporting on Swift's reactions and activities in her suite. They will also be more likely to crowd around the TV during the half time show and wonder why everybody else seemed totally uninterested and went and got food.

The point in all that is that a person's mindset totally dictates their priorities, attitudes and actions as well as what they think and feel about others! Perhaps this is why one of the most destructive and dangerous mindsets in all the world is a religious mindset. A religious mindset twists the truth about God and as a result does nothing but influence people away from godliness, even while it claims to be all about godliness. The story in 1st Samuel chapter four demonstrates this exact reality.

Proposition: There are 3 parts to the story in 1 Samuel 4 that demonstrate the twisted influence of a religious mindset.

The first part of the story that demonstrates the twisted influence of a religious mindset is seen in verses one through five.

- (1) **Because of their religious mindset, Israel sought God's blessings rather than God. (4:1-5)**

A. 1 And the word of Samuel came to all Israel. (4:1a)

1. Scholars seem concerned over the placement of 1 Samuel 4:1a and much has been written about it. Personally, I believe too much thought has been given to it. All 4:1a does is continue the pattern of contrast and tension. Samuel is beginning to have influence in Israel, but as we will see in a minute, he is not leading it yet. Samuel has a ministry of Godly influence in that he has spoken God's Word to them in the previous chapter, but that doesn't mean they are listening.
2. On the other hand, as you will see in a second, it appears the Elders of Israel; Eli, who is The Judge of Israel; and Eli's son's, are all leading Israel with no real concern over anything God had to say. It's sadly, a leadership reality the people of Israel seem more than willing to get in line with. So, what happens?

B. Now Israel went out to battle against the Philistines. They encamped at Ebenezer, and the Philistines encamped at Aphek. (4:1b)

1. The passage makes no mention of who the aggressor was, therefore, to no surprise scholars are split on who initiated this battle. The passage also makes no mention of seeking God about anything related to this battle. The absence of that sort of statement shouldn't be overlooked.

2. "The Philistines likely were among the Sea Peoples who appear to have migrated from various parts of the Mediterranean to the coastlands of Palestine (see Num 24:24; Jer 47:4; Amos 9:7). They seem to have arrived around the same time as the Israelites (ca. 1200 bc). They were fierce in battle, defeating the Hittite, Ugaritic, and Amurru kingdoms, as well as the Egyptians and Israelites. By the time of the Samuel narratives, the Philistines have already claimed a few coastal cities, and they are trying to push eastward to conquer Israelite territory."¹

3. "The Philistines, Israel's principal enemy during the period of the last of the Judges (Jud. 10:6–8; 13–16), were a non-Semitic people whose origins were most likely in Crete or in some other part of the Aegean Sea area (Gen. 10:14; see Jer. 47:4; Deut. 2:23; Amos 9:7). They came to Canaan in two different migrations, one as early as Abraham's time (2000 b.c.) and the other about 1200 b.c. They lived in five main towns on the southern Canaan coast—Gaza, Ashkelon, Ekron, Gath, and Ashdod. They were technologically advanced, pioneering in the use of iron and in other skills (1 Sam. 13:19–20). The primary god of their pantheon was Dagon, a deity worshiped also in upper Mesopotamia as a grain god. Some scholars suggest that the Philistine Dagon was represented as having a human torso and upper body and a fish's tail. It may well be that the originally seafaring Philistines brought their fish god with them to Canaan and then adapted him to the Semitic god Dagon (or Dagan, as it is known outside the Bible), because of their need to become a grain-producing people (Jud. 15:3–5)."²

4. "This passage (1 Sam 4:1–22) contains the first mention of the Philistines in 1 Samuel. The Philistines will play a crucial role in the development of the early monarchy in Israel. The original homeland of the Philistines is uncertain, although most scholars today would place it somewhere in the Aegean region. Although there are some references to Philistine kings with Semitic names in the book of Genesis, and the Samson story in Judges contains references to unnamed Philistine individuals, the first appearance of Philistines with demonstrably non-Semitic names is in 1 Samuel. Technologically and artistically, the Philistines were superior to the early Israelites. It is very likely that the chariots they used (thirty thousand in 1

¹ Barry, J. D., Mangum, D., Brown, D. R., Heiser, M. S., Custis, M., Ritzema, E., ... Bomar, D. (2012, 2016). [Faithlife Study Bible](#) (1 Sa 4:1). Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

² Merrill, E. H. (1985). [1 Samuel](#). In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 1, p. 436). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

Sam 13:5) were—like those of the Canaanites before them (Josh 17:16, 18; Judg 1:19; 4:3, 13)—“iron chariots” (בְּחֵל רֶכֶב, *barzel rekhev*). First Samuel 13:19–21 tells of a Philistine monopoly on metalworking, which kept the early Israelites effectively disarmed through a lack of metal-tipped weapons. This situation only gradually improved through the capture of weapons from defeated enemies. There is no mention in the present passage of a technological superiority.”³

5. “The locale of the engagement is set at the outset: between Ebenezer (הַעֲזֶרֶת, *ha'ezzer ha'even*) and Aphek (אֶפֶק, *apheq*). This is a natural site for a military engagement on the border between the coastal lowlands, where the Philistines lived, and the central highlands, where the Israelites lived. The identification of Ebenezer depends on that of Aphek. Albright claimed that there were five biblical Apheks: in Asher, Aram, Lebanon, Sharon, and Judah. The fourth of these Apheks, that in the Plain of Sharon, is now conclusively proven to be at Rās el-‘Ain, located close to the sources of the Yarkon River and identical with Hellenistic-Roman Antipatris. Excavations at the site and abundant textual references within and outside of the Bible allow a reconstruction of the site’s history. During the eleventh century bc it was occupied by Philistines and served as a staging area for Philistine troops preparing war against the Israelites (see 1 Sam 4:1; 29:1). If the identification of the Aphek mentioned here in the Plain of Sharon with Ra’s el-‘Ain is accepted, then Ebenezer—where the Israelite troops were staged—lay east of it, closer to the mountains. Eusebius (*Onom.* 33:25) erroneously located the site between Jerusalem and Ashkelon near the village of Beth Shemesh. Some today would identify it with ‘Izbet Sartah. Aphek lay at the northernmost point of the territory controlled by the Philistines at this time.”⁴

C. 2 The Philistines drew up in line against Israel, and when the battle spread, Israel was defeated by the Philistines, who killed about four thousand men on the field of battle. 3 And when the troops came to the camp, the elders of Israel said, "Why has the LORD defeated us today before the Philistines? Let us bring the ark of the covenant of the LORD here from Shiloh, that it may come among us and save us from the power of our enemies." 4 So the people sent to Shiloh and brought from there the ark of the covenant of the LORD of hosts, who is enthroned on the cherubim. And the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were there with the ark of the covenant of God. 5 As soon as the ark of the covenant of the LORD came into the camp, all Israel gave a mighty shout, so that the earth resounded.

1. In pagan religions, if you defeat me, it’s because your god defeated my god. However, in verse three the Jewish leaders give no credit or even

³ Hoffner, H. A., Jr. (2015). [1 & 2 Samuel](#) (1 Sa 4:1b–22). Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

⁴ Hoffner, H. A., Jr. (2015). [1 & 2 Samuel](#) (1 Sa 4:1). Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

acknowledgement of the gods of the Philistines. They correctly say they lost because God deemed it to be so, but then turn right around and make a completely incorrect decision on what to do about it! Instead of crying out to the one and only God who had called them out to be His people, who had made a covenant with them to prosper them in life and battle as long as they lived in submission to Him; instead of doing that, they go get the Ark and believe “it,” not God, would save them!

2. Now, it is true that God had used the Ark in the demonstration of His power and commitment to Israel, but the Ark was no magic bullet, source of divine power, nor mechanism of getting God’s blessings. Every GenXer knows what I’m talking about. How could we ever forget the movie, “Raiders Of The Lost Ark,” that depicted the fictional story of the Nazi’s attempting to find and harness the supernatural powers of the Ark of the Lord, as if, it, of itself, had powers that could be used for one’s own glory (more on that when we get to 1st Samuel 5 and 6!).
3. For now, the point that can’t be missed is that the Israelites literally believed they could receive God’s favor and power, not by repenting of their sins and seeking to know and follow Him, but rather by bringing the Ark to the battle—Religion.
4. There are tons of religious things people do to try and get God’s power and favor on their side—sacraments, prayer, fasting, communion, relics, songs, dances, chants, going to church, reading their Bible, giving money and many other things on a seemingly endless list of good works people deem worthy of earning God’s favor and power. However, it’s all the product of a mindset that twists the truth of God into a way of getting the power of God to do what you want, rather than the way and reason to have God as who you want!
5. Once you get to verse 5, the Israelites now have the Ark in their camp, and they are ecstatic! They had lost 4,000 men in the previous battle, but now they believed they had access to the power of God, which if truly accessed would well make up for the loss of those men. So, how did it work out for the Israelites? How did getting the Ark which contained the relics of their faith impact their lives? Well,

The second part of the story that demonstrates the twisted influence of a religious mindset is seen in verses six through eleven.

(2) Because of their religious mindset, Israel confidently ran right into the arms of defeat. (4:6-11)

A. 6 And when the Philistines heard the noise of the shouting, they said, "What does this great shouting in the camp of the Hebrews mean?" And

when they learned that the ark of the LORD had come to the camp, 7 the Philistines were afraid, for they said, "A god has come into the camp." And they said, "Woe to us! For nothing like this has happened before. 8 Woe to us! Who can deliver us from the power of these mighty gods? These are the gods who struck the Egyptians with every sort of plague in the wilderness.

1. The sad reality of the testimony of the Jewish people is that somehow in the many generations of those who testified of what God had done in and through them, things had got so twisted up that the Philistines assumed the Israelites were excited to get their "gods" back on their side! What a complete twisting of the truth! The faith of the Jewish people was that there is one God and His name is Yahweh. This God, the only God, had created the Universe and everything in it, called the Jewish people out to be His people, and had clearly demonstrated His power and glory in doing so, but the Philistines who bordered the Jewish lands, had no correct knowledge of Him! Somehow, perhaps because of the grotesque amount of idol worship among the Jewish people, the lost and pagan Philistines had a totally twisted understanding of the most elementary part of the Jewish faith!
2. But here's the ironic twist. If you're a Philistine going to battle against the only God that exists, then that's a massive losing proposition. You're going into battle godless! However, if it's our gods versus their gods, then who's to say they have any more chance of winning than we do, after all, it's not as if the Philistines are a floundering nation who haven't experienced victory. They have already conquered lands on the west coast and as such likely believe their gods are the reason for those victories. So, despite what they believe to be the victories of the gods of the Israelites, there's no reason to lessen the victories they believe to be from their gods either! As such, the Philistine leaders cry out,

B. 9 Take courage, and be men, O Philistines, lest you become slaves to the Hebrews as they have been to you; be men and fight." 10 So the Philistines fought, and Israel was defeated, and they fled, every man to his home. And there was a very great slaughter, for there fell of Israel thirty thousand foot soldiers. 11 And the ark of God was captured, and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, died.

1. Without the ark they lost 4,000 men, but with the ark they lost 30,000 men! So much for the use of the ark as a relic to get access to God's power!
2. More shocking, is that the Ark itself was captured by the Philistines! The physical symbol of God's Covenant promise to Israel had just been took from Israel. In addition, this put the de facto capital of Israel, Shiloh, which was likely only about 25 miles from where this battle took place, dead in the cross hairs of the Philistines. With Israel's army running scattered and in disarray, Israel was ripe for defeat!

3. It's in verse eleven we find out the news that will eventually get to Eli and totally devastate him. Ironically, it's not the news of what happened to his sons that causes his death, but rather the Ark. Sadly, Eli knew this day was coming for his sons. He may not have known it was going to be that day, but an unnamed prophet in 1st Samuel 2 had told him this was going to happen, then God spoke to Samuel and confirmed it to Eli that what he had previously been told was indeed true. Ironically, the news of his sons that guaranteed all the judgements against Eli and his descendants were true, is not what ultimately killed Eli.
4. The point however that we need to see right now is that Israel went into this battle with complete confidence that they were going to win because they now had The Ark. There was no hesitation. From their perspective if they had the ark, they had God, and if they had God they would win! They were treating the ark and God like a genie in a bottle ready to leap out and do whatever it is they wanted, all they needed was the bottle and the magic words! 34,000 men now laid on the ground dead; Israel was in the most vulnerable position of its existence as a nation, and it was entirely because of their religious mindset that had completely twisted up the truth of God and the covenant He made with them. They had so twisted up God's Word that they ran into battle thinking they could cover up the consequences of their idolatrous living simply by bringing a magic box to battle.

The third part of the story that demonstrates the twisted influence of a religious mindset is seen in verses twelve through twenty two.

(3) Because of their religious mindset, Israel viewed God's discipline as abandonment. (4:12-22)

- A. Now this was truly an absolutely horrific battle in the life of Israel. 34,000 men died in this battle. It was truly a horrific day for Eli. His two sons died, which confirmed all that had been prophesied against him would happen as well (1 Samuel 2:34). But ironically, in all their understandable grief over what has happened, their religious mindset still led to an incorrect view about what happened. They believed the capture of the Ark meant God had abandon them, something if you knew the nature of God, He would never do! But a religious mindset always twists up the truth about God. Let me read the final part of the story to you and let you see what happened.
- B. **12 A man of Benjamin ran from the battle line and came to Shiloh the same day, with his clothes torn and with dirt on his head. 13 When he arrived, Eli was sitting on his seat by the road watching, for his heart trembled for the ark of God. And when the man came into the city and told the news, all the city cried out. 14 When Eli heard the sound of the outcry, he said, "What is this uproar?" Then the man hurried and came and told Eli. 15 Now Eli was**

ninety-eight years old and his eyes were set so that he could not see. **16 And the man said to Eli, "I am he who has come from the battle; I fled from the battle today." And he said, "How did it go, my son?" 17 He who brought the news answered and said, "Israel has fled before the Philistines, and there has also been a great defeat among the people. Your two sons also, Hophni and Phinehas, are dead, and the ark of God has been captured." 18 As soon as he mentioned the ark of God, Eli fell over backward from his seat by the side of the gate, and his neck was broken and he died, for the man was old and heavy. He had judged Israel forty years.**

1. To Eli's credit, in all of his selfishness and sin, there was at least a brokenness over the idea of God abandoning Israel. Eli was obsessed, not with the plight of his sons, but of the Ark, because to him its capture meant that God's judgement had begun on all of Israel; that God was done with Israel as He was done with Eli and his family. This is a religiously twisted view of how God works, but it's exactly how a religious mindset works.
2. It's interesting. The people who panic the most about bad things happening in their lives are those who have knowingly lived religiously hypocritical lives. R.D. Phillips noted of John Calvin, "**He who is the boldest despiser of God is of all men the most startled at the rustle of a falling leaf.**"⁵
3. Those, like Eli, who blatantly live two lives, one to try and get God and people to approve of them, and another to completely appease the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and boastful pride of life, know in the back of their minds that they may be fooling everybody around them, but there is no way they are fooling God. Therefore, the moment anything goes wrong they are convinced the entire house of cards is coming down. They have continued their charade for years thinking they have already blown it so they might as well keep it up, and now the inevitable damnation is upon them! This view was not only how Eli likely viewed the day's events, but it was shared by others as well, including his daughter-in-law who left no room to wonder what she believed had happened!

- C. **19 Now his daughter-in-law, the wife of Phinehas, was pregnant, about to give birth. And when she heard the news that the ark of God was captured, and that her father-in-law and her husband were dead, she bowed and gave birth, for her pains came upon her. 20 And about the time of her death the women attending her said to her, "Do not be afraid, for you have borne a son." But she did not answer or pay attention. 21 And she named the child Ichabod, saying, "The glory has departed from Israel!" because the ark of God had been captured and because of her father-in-law and her**

⁵ Phillips, R. D. (2012). [1 Samuel](#). (P. G. Ryken & R. D. Phillips, Duguid Iain M., Eds.) (1st ed., pp. 85–95). Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing.

husband. 22 And she said, "The glory has departed from Israel, for the ark of God has been captured."

1. This passage has been incorrectly applied throughout Christian history more times than any person could possibly count. I've actually been told by a handful of legalist that God himself had pronounced Ichabod over Venture. Typically, they were irate about our music style and/or our genuine desire to prioritize loving the people in the world we are appealing to, to repent and believe in Jesus. Whenever legalistic Christians see a Christian or a church doing something they think is ungodly, they love to pronounce "Ichabod" over them. Now, there's so much wrong with all that I honestly don't have time to even get started, but I do need to point out the common fundamental twisting of the truth of God that the modern legalist and the assumptions of Phinehas' widow have in common. God was not done with Israel! God's glory had not departed from them at all! Again, R.D, Phillips captures what was going on here so well. He wrote,
2. **"The elders thought that by bringing the ark they had ensured that God would defend his honor; little did they realize that God intended to defend his honor by sending the Philistines to bring judgment on his idolatrous people!"⁶**
3. God's glory hadn't departed Israel, it was shining through in his judgement of Israel. First of all, God will not be mocked. God told Israel that if they didn't stop worshipping idols, He would punish them; Joshua even made that it his last appeal. Numerous judges after Joshua confronted them about it, yet, as you will see later in Samuel, the practice persisted. Add to that the total corruption of the priesthood, and God's discipline was long overdue. He had patiently given them time to repent but they refused. However, understand that God never brought judgment on Israel to eliminate them or abandon them, but rather to rescue them from the worship of false gods that can never bring life. It is the MERCY of God that rescues us from our sin, even if by pain! But a religious mindset has no chance of seeing the love of a father in his chastisement, only the loss of what they wanted.
4. **5 And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? "My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. 6 For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives." 7 It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? 8 If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. (Hebrews 12:5-8)**

⁶ Phillips, R. D. (2012). [1 Samuel](#). (P. G. Ryken & R. D. Phillips, Duguid Iain M., Eds.) (1st ed., pp. 78-84). Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing.

Challenge: Is the experience of your life being directed by a religious mindset or Gospel mindset?

A religious mindset expects God to bless me if I do things right and curse me if I do things wrong. Those who continually struggle to meet what they believe to be God's expectations will eventually quit trying, while those who perceive themselves to be successful at it will become arrogant and judgmental of those who aren't. Ironically, those who perceive themselves to be good at what God expects will eventually find themselves bitter at God and life when the trials of life create circumstances, they believe they don't deserve.

A Gospel mindset believes God has already blessed me by giving me eternal life and adopting me as His child forever. People with this mindset labor to obey God not to change their circumstances, but because they are blown away by His love for them. They view trials caused by their own sin and failures as opportunities to gain wisdom and maturity. They view trials not of their making as opportunities to experience the richness of a relationship with God and others as they walk with Him through them.

In my personal time with the Lord this week I found myself meditating on James 1 as I prayed for myself and others. The fact of the matter, just like the Israelites in 1st Samuel, sometimes in life we will go through trials entirely of our own making, and other times we will go through trials that have nothing to do with anything that was in our control. In life there are truly "various kinds" of trials. Some are barely a blip on the radar and require little if any attention from us, while others explode the radar and totally dominate our life! However, no matter the trial, how you experience it is not ultimately determined by the trial; but rather your mindset that interprets the trial. Its why James wrote,

2 Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, 3 for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. 4 And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. (James 2:2-4)

Its why Paul wrote,

1 Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. 2 Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. 3 More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, 4 and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, 5 and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. (Romans 5:1-5)

Finally, its why Peter wrote,

3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, 5 who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. 6 In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, 7 so that the tested genuineness of your faith--more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire--may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. (1 Peter 1:3-7)

The only way to have a mindset with that kind of power and strength in trials; with that kind of optimism and life when everything around you is attacking your optimism about life, is to constantly feed your mind and emotions the Gospel that shapes it! The only way to have that mindset is to repent from your religious mindset, to call it the twisted version of the truth that it is, and turn your head and heart towards Jesus, making no justification for yourself to have any other mindset other than the mind of Christ!