

STUDY 2 – RAIDERS OF THE LOST ARK – 1 SAMUEL 4:1b-7:1

Steven Spielberg’s film Indiana Jones and the Raiders of the Lost Ark is a classic – the story of a race between Indiana Jones and the Nazis to find the ancient Old Testament relic, the ‘ark of the covenant’. Of course, Indy wins and the Nazis lose, but they both have one thing in common: *they both think God can be kept in a box*. As 21st-century people—and as Christians in particular—we, of course, know this is nonsense. But then we read 1 Samuel 4:1b-7:1, and we are forced to think again. Can God live in a box? And if so, what does that say about whether his power can be harnessed by people or not? Let’s turn to the story and find out.

Read Hebrews 9:1-5.

1. What did the ark contain? From which period in Israel’s history did all of these objects come?

2. What is the “mercy seat” (ESV) or “atonement cover” (NIV)? What does it signify? (See Exodus 25:17-22 and Leviticus 16:1-2, 15-16.)

Read 1 Samuel 4:1b-22.

3. After reading 1 Samuel 4:1-11, how would you answer the question, “Can God live in a box?”

4. Why does God allow the Israelites to be defeated in their second battle with the Philistines in 1 Samuel 4:10-11, even though they have the ark with them this time? (See 1 Samuel 2:34-35.)

Read 1 Samuel 5-6.

5. Why do you think God lets the Philistines capture the ark after the battle in 1 Samuel 4:10-11? How does this apparent loss work for his Glory?

6. What do the Philistines remember about the God of Israel? (See 1 Samuel 4:8, 6:6.) What is significant about this?

Read Romans 3:21-25.

7. What is the *redemption* that God offers us now?

Redemption

The word ‘redemption’ relates to the freeing of slaves, and was used particularly in the Old Testament to refer to God freeing Israel from slavery in the Exodus.

8. How did God achieve that redemption?

Implications

(Choose one or more of the following to think about further or to discuss together.)

- A friend of yours exclaims, “You can’t say that there’s only one way to God, through Jesus. That’s just putting God in a box!” Given what we have seen in this study, how would you respond to this?
- What comfort can we draw from the fact that God has revealed himself in a particular place and time in history—first in the ark, and now on the cross?
- How can we ‘put God in a box’ in the wrong way – to presume upon his presence, protection and power – trying to manipulate him towards our own agendas? What steps can we take to avoid doing this?

Give thanks and pray

- Thank God for the redemption he has won for us through the ‘atonement cover’ of the cross.
- Pray that our non-Christian friends and family might see the great victory God has won for them on the cross.
- Pray for God to forgive us when we have attempted to manipulate him to fulfil our plans, and that he would help us instead get on board with his plans.