

## FIRST SAMUEL

### A DIGEST OF CHAPTER 4

- Vv. 1-11 *The loss of the Ark.* Israel's fortunes fell to a low ebb when the Ark of the Covenant was captured by the Philistines. This is a fulfillment of the prophecy made by the unnamed prophet (2:27-36) and by the young man Samuel (3:11-14). The things which were happening were enough to make the ears of those who heard to tingle.
- Vv. 12-18 *Death of Eli.* The bad news of the loss of the Ark was a shock to Eli. He had been waiting anxiously to hear news from the battle. When it came, he was overwhelmed by it.
- Vv. 19-22 *Sadness in Israel.* All Israel was affected by the sad news of the loss of the Ark. Typical of this sadness was the name, Ichabod, given to the son of Phinehas. Indeed, the glory had departed from Israel.

### LESSONS FOR LEARNING

1. *God does not abide in symbols.* The Ark of the Covenant was but a symbol of the presence of the Lord. The people of Israel thought that its presence would assure them of victory in battle. Their superstitious enemies, the Philistines also supposed that having the Ark on the battlefield was equivalent to God's being there. The Living God, however, does not dwell in temples made with men's hands. Moreover, He cannot be confined to a wooden box. His spirit is with those who worship Him in spirit and in truth.
2. *Disobedience breeds anxiety.* The aged high priest sitting in the gate of the Tabernacle area and worrying about the safety of the Ark is a pathetic picture of a man who has failed to take proper measures to guarantee

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God's blessings. If Eli had rebuked his sons in their earlier evil ways, he would have been strong enough to resist their unholy desire to take the Ark of the Covenant to the battlefield. Since he had been lenient on them in former activities, he was in no position to resist them in their final, fatal follies. He was left sitting helpless while tragedy fell.

3. *National calamity brings personal heartache.* Eli's daughter-in-law, the wife of Phinehas, was caught up in the holocaust of Israel's national disaster. Left alone in the midst of the pains of childbirth which ultimately resulted in her own death, she used her last breath to give a very descriptive name to her son—Ichabod. What was true for the millions of Israel was true for each individual. God had departed from them, because they had departed from God.

The Loss of the Ark and End of Eli's House, 4:1-22.

### *The Loss of the Ark. 4:1-11*

And the word of Samuel came to all Israel. Now Israel went out against the Philistines to battle, and pitched beside Ezenezer: and the Philistines pitched in Aphek.

2 And the Philistines put themselves in array against Israel: and when they joined battle, Israel was smitten before the Philistines: and they slew of the army in the field about four thousand men.

3 And when the people were come into the camp, the elders of Israel said, Wherefore hath the Lord smitten us today before the Philistines? Let us fetch the ark of the covenant of the Lord out of Shiloh unto us, that, when it cometh among us, it may save us out of the hand of our enemies.

4 So the people sent to Shiloh, that they might bring from thence the ark of the covenant of the Lord of hosts, which dwelleth *between* the cherubim: and the two sons

of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, *were* there with the ark of the covenant of God.

5 And when the ark of the covenant of the Lord came into the camp, all Israel shouted with a great shout, so that the earth rang again.

6 And when the Philistines heard the noise of the shout, they said, What *meaneth* the noise of this great shout in the camp of the Hebrews? And they understood the ark of the Lord was come into the camp.

7 And the Philistines were afraid, for they said, God is come into the camp. And they said, Woe unto us! for there hath not been such a thing heretofore.

8 Woe unto us! who shall deliver us out of the hand of these mighty Gods? these *are* the Gods that smote the Egyptians with all the plagues in the wilderness.

9 Be strong, and quit yourselves like men, O ye Philistines, that ye be not servants unto the Hebrews, as they have been to you: quit yourselves like men, and fight.

10 And the Philistines fought, and Israel was smitten, and they fled every man into his tent: and there was a very great slaughter; for there fell of Israel thirty thousand footmen.

11 And the ark of God was taken; and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were slain.

1. *In what way did the word of Samuel come to all Israel? 4:1*

The background of the verb translated *came* indicates that the words which Samuel spoke came to pass. If he predicted certain things would occur, they did occur. Certain judgments which he pronounced were judgments of truth. In this way it is known that Samuel was a prophet. All Israel saw that the things which he spoke were true. None of his prophecies failed. He was speaking as God spoke to him.

*2. Where is Eben-ezer? 4:2*

From later history we learn that Eben-ezer was a spot named by Samuel. It was located between Mispah and Shen. It is quite near the old Roman road that runs northwest out of the city of Jerusalem and is located in the hill country of the tribe of Benjamin. Aphek is farther north and west and was a rallying place for the Philistines whenever they came up to attack Israel. Aphek would be found in the edge of the hill country as it began to slope down towards the Mediterranean sea.

*3. Why did the elders of Israel send for the Ark? 4:3*

They were the old folk; they should have known better. This is an illustration of the old people leading the young people out of the right track. The older people were teaching them wrong. They were corrupt. They had come to trust in the Ark itself as a sort of graven image to deliver them. These elders were afraid of the enemy, the Philistines, and sent for the Ark, thinking that its presence would bring freedom and deliverance to them.

*4. What was this Ark? 4:3*

This was the Ark that went before the people at the invasion of the country and the siege of Jericho. Jehovah and the Ark were very closely identified. It was a chest and it contained the two tables of the Covenant. It was covered with gold and named the Ark of the Testimony. When the command was given for its construction, the following dimensions were laid out: "two cubits and a half shall be the length thereof, and a cubit and a half the height thereof" (Exodus 25:10b). The same word is used to describe the sacophagus of Joseph (Genesis 50:26) and of the box set by the side of the altar to receive the money contributions of the worshipers (II Kings 12:10). The Ark of the Covenant was made of acacia wood.

*5. What were the cherubims? 4:4*

The cherubims were angelic figures. It is not necessary to spell this word as it is spelled in the King James version.

The form cherubim signifies the plurality of the word. We do often speak of a cherub and think of a cherub as being a little angel. Two of these cherubim were on the mercy seat which was placed over the Ark of the covenant. These cherubim spread out their wings and covered the mercy seat with their faces one to another (Exodus 37).

6. *Why were the Israelites called Hebrews? 4:6*

The Hebrews were descendants of Eber. Eber was a descendant of Shem. Shem is described as the father of all the children of Eber (Genesis 10:21). After Lot was captured by the kings of the East, one of the Canaanites came and told "Abram the Hebrew" (Genesis 14:13). Thus the children of Israel had been known as Hebrews for centuries, and it may have been the favorite name of their enemies, although we find men speaking of the name without being ashamed of it.

7. *Why were the Philistines afraid? 4:7*

The Philistines thought that there was an unusual appearance of God himself. They had heard of the mighty act which God had performed as they mentioned later. They must have remembered that it was the God of the Hebrews who had shaken down the walls of Jericho. It was He who had parted the water of the Jordan and enabled His people to cross over in dry land. Now they found themselves face to face with this God. It was their superstition which brought fear to them.

8. *Did the Philistines think the Israelites had many Gods? 4:8*

They asked, "Who shall deliver us out of the hand of these mighty Gods?" They went on to say, "These are the Gods that smote the Egyptians." Whether they thought that Israel had many Gods or only one, we cannot determine from the wording of the verse. The Hebrew word for God is plural in form. It may be that they were saying, "Who shall deliver us out of the hand of this

mighty God? This is the God that smote the Egyptians." The Israelites had given them no reason to believe that they had many Gods.

9. *When had the Israelites served the Philistines? 4:9*

Israel had been beaten by the Philistines many times in their past history. These Philistines were the perennial enemies of Israel. Samson had brought some deliverance (Judges 13-16), but his deliverance had not been long lived. Sampson himself had died in the prison house in Gaza, one of the principal towns of Philistia.

10. *Were the expectations of the elders realized? 4:10*

The Philistines smote the Israelites, and every man had to flee. 30,000 men of the Israelites fell there. This was 26,000 more than were slain in the first movement, which is described in verse two. Moreover, the Ark of God was taken; and the two sons of Eli were slain. All of this was accomplished by the unexpected resurgence of courage into the ranks of the Philistines. If the elders of Israel had expected something of courage to come to the men of Israel, they were disappointed. Instead, the courage of despair surged through the Philistines.

*Death of Eli. 4:12-18*

12 And there ran a man of Benjamin out of the army, and came to Shiloh the same day with his clothes rent, and with earth upon his head.

13 And when he came, lo, Eli sat upon a seat by the wayside watching: for his heart trembled for the ark of God. And when the man came into the city, and told *it*, all the city cried out.

14 And when Eli heard the noise of the crying, he said, What *meaneth* the noise of this tumult? And the man came in hastily, and told Eli.

15 Now Eli was ninety and eight years old; and his eyes were dim, that he could not see.

16 And the man said unto Eli, I *am* he that came out of

the army, and I fled today out of the army. And he said, What is there done, my son?

17 And the messenger answered and said, Israel is fled before the Philistines, and there hath been also a great slaughter among the people, and thy two sons also, Hophni and Phinehas, are dead, and the ark of God is taken.

18 And it came to pass, when he made mention of the ark of God, that he fell from off the seat backward by the side of the gate, and his neck brake, and he died: for he was an old man, and heavy. And he had judged Israel forty years.

11. *Who was the messenger from the battle? 4:12*

Rabbinical tradition makes him to have been Saul. All the Scriptures tell us is that he was a Benjamite. The rabbinical tradition tells quite a story of the manner in which Saul had rescued the tables of the Law from the hands of Goliath and then had run to tell Eli. This Benjamite, who is unnamed is, however, described. He was in deep distress, having his clothes rent and earth on his head. These were the usual signs of grief (see II Samuel 1:2; 15:32); but he still had a task to perform, that of bringing the tidings of the battle to the people at Shiloh and to Eli, the old priest.

12. *Where was Eli and why there? 4:13*

He was at the roadside watching because he was anxious for the safety of the Ark of God. The road would naturally be the one leading to the scene of the battle. Yet the fugitive apparently comes first to the town and afterwards to Eli. If we understand that the gate mentioned is the gate to the Tabernacle, at which he was accustomed to sit (I Samuel 1:9) then we can better understand his position. Though he was blind, his mind was intent upon the road along which news must come. When the bearer of tidings came first to the town, the people shrieked at the news: and Eli heard the outcry before the messenger reached him, although the messenger had not delayed.

13. *Why did Eli have to ask the meaning of the tumult?*  
4:14

As we have already read and as we read again in verse fifteen, Eli's eyes were dim. He could not see. As a man who was blind, he had to ask what the meaning of all the tumult might be. No doubt he was giving expression of his constant anxiety for the safety of the Ark and the fulfillment of God's judgment against his house.

14. *What effect did the news have on Eli and why?* 4:18

He was old and was blind. Eli must have known the Ark was going out, and he must have known that they had done wrong. He realized his own mistakes. Sitting there in the darkness of the so-called black cataract (for this is the description as given and generally is an affliction paralyzing the optic nerves of those who reach a great age) he was trembling for the safety of the Ark. He did not react so much to the news about the death of his two sons; but when he heard of the capture of the Ark, he fell back from his seat and broke his neck and died. The items of the news reach him in a scale of ascendancy: Israel had fled from before the Philistines, there was a great slaughter of the people, Eli's two sons were dead, and the Ark of God had been captured.

*Sadness in Israel.* 4:19-22

19 And his daughter-in-law, Phinehas' wife, was with child, *near* to be delivered: and when she heard the tidings that the ark of God was taken, and that her father-in-law and her husband were dead, she bowed herself and travailed; for her pains came upon her.

20 And about the time of her death the woman that stood by her said unto her, Fear not; for thou hast borne a son. But she answered not, neither did she regard *it*.

21 And she named the child Ichabod, saying, The glory is departed from Israel: because the ark of God was taken, and because of her father-in-law and her husband.



22 And she said, The glory is departed from Israel: for the Ark of God is taken.

15. *What is the meaning of the word Ichabod? 4:21*

The real meaning of the word is, "where is the glory." It is also translated "there is no glory." Phinehas' wife knew that the glory of Israel was gone when the Ark was captured. We can rest assured that the glory of God's people is gone whenever they turn their backs on Him. This is the sad story of many individual lives, many churches and many Christian schools. They have forsaken their first love. The glory of God has departed from them because they have departed from God.

16. *What was the fundamental error in taking the Ark into the battle?*

It was the error of idolatry. Simply because of the fact that the Ark of the Covenant was in the Holy of Holies, and because it had been with the children of Israel in the wanderings of the wilderness and had preserved them, seemingly, these people thought that the Power was in the chest covered with gold, when the strength was in the Lord, who had caused the great deliverance and even commanded the making of the Ark.

It is just the same now, when we take merely a historical Christ outside us for our Redeemer. If we had not Christ, we could never stand. For there is no help in heaven and on earth beside Him. But if we have Him in no other way than merely without us and under us, if we only preach about Him, teach, hear, read, talk, discuss, and dispute about Him, He will no more help us than the Ark helped the Israelites.

## CHAPTER 4 IN REVIEW

1. Where did Israel pitch her camp? \_\_\_\_\_
2. Where did the Philistines pitch their camp? \_\_\_\_\_
3. What did the people take into battle with them? \_\_\_\_\_

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4. What name did the Philistines call the Israelites? \_\_\_\_\_
5. How many Israelites were killed in the first battle? \_\_\_\_\_
6. How many Israelites were killed in the second battle? \_\_\_\_\_
7. How old was Eli? \_\_\_\_\_
8. Of what tribe was the messenger who brought news of the battle? \_\_\_\_\_
9. What was the name of Eli's grandson? \_\_\_\_\_
10. To which of Eli's sons was the grandson born? \_\_\_\_\_

## A DIGEST OF CHAPTER 5

- Vv. 1- 6 *The Ark in the temple of Dagon.* The Philistines treated the Ark of the Lord as if it were a part of the spoils of war. Since they worshiped the false god, Dagon, they took the Ark to the temple of Dagon. It was installed there as a trophy of war and as a sign of the superiority of their god over the God of the Israelites.
- Vv. 7- 9 *The Ark in Gath.* From the temple of Dagon in Ashdod, the Ark was carried to the city of Gath. This was one of the most important cities in Philistia and is famous in later times as the home of Goliath.
- Vv. 10-12 *The Ark in Ekron.* When an affliction from the Lord came on the inhabitants of Gath, they asked that the Ark be removed from their community. The men of Ekron were horrified when they saw the Ark had been brought to their city. They, too, asked to have it removed.