

1Samuel 4:1 ¶ And the word of Samuel came to all Israel. Now Israel went out against the Philistines to battle, and pitched beside Ebenezer: and the Philistines pitched in Aphek.

1Samuel 4:2 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.

This chapter opens with a statement that the word of Samuel was heard throughout Israel. I think this must reference back to the message of judgment against Eli since what follows occurs in fulfillment of that word from the LORD.

Israel had become subservient to the Philistines and had evidently decided it was time to regain their freedom. So they went out to battle against the Philistines and established a base camp at Ebenezer; the Philistines established camp at Aphek. When they engaged in battle, the Philistines defeated Israel and killed about 4000 men in the process.

Guzik offered this historical insight: "Israel competed on more equal terms with Moab and Ammon but the Philistines had Greek military equipment (such as helmets, shields, chain mail armor, swords and spears) making the Philistines more formidable opponents. The Philistines were the first people in Canaan to process iron and they made the most of it."

1Samuel 4:3 And when the people were come into the camp, the elders of Israel said, Wherefore hath the LORD smitten us to day 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.

When the remaining men of Israel returned to camp in defeat, the leaders of Israel couldn't understand why the LORD had allowed them to be defeated. They concluded that they needed to bring the "ark of the covenant of the LORD" from Shiloh to ensure their victory.

The problem was that they were putting their faith in the ark and not in the LORD. They were treating it no differently than other nations treated the idols to their false gods. There is no indication that they had even sought the LORD's guidance before going to battle. They basically expected the LORD to approve their actions without regard to His will in the matter.

1Samuel 4:4 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 cherubims: and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, *were* there with the ark of the covenant of God.

1Samuel 4:5 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.

So they brought the ark from Shiloh, and Eli's two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, accompanied them. When the ark arrived in the camp, the people shouted so loudly with joy that the Philistines heard them.

1Samuel 4:6 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 that the ark of the LORD was come into the camp.

1Samuel 4:7 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.

1Samuel 4:8 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.

The Philistines wondered what had caused such a commotion in the camp of Israel and eventually learned that the ark of the LORD was in the camp. This provoked fear among the Philistine army because they realized, "God is come into the camp." Though they did not recognize "God" to be the LORD, the self-existent eternal God, they did recognize Him as the God that had delivered Israel from the Egyptians by causing terrible plagues. In fact, they credited the deliverance of the Israelites to their "Gods" plural.

1Samuel 4:9 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.

1Samuel 4:10 ¶ 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.

1Samuel 4:11 And the ark of God was taken; and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were slain.

The leaders of the Philistine army rebuked their soldiers and encouraged them to fight like men and not become subservient to the Hebrews. So the Philistines fought and again defeated Israel; this time 30,000 men lost their lives. They also captured the ark of God and killed the two sons of Eli. Samuel's prophecy proved true and further affirmed him as God's prophet.

I liked Guzik's observation on this section: "Godless Philistines can teach us something. Christians need to show more of this courage. Instead of giving up when things look bad we should trust the LORD and fight all the harder and decide we will *not* give up. Courage and persistence win many battles, even sometimes for the wrong side."

He also provided another interesting bit of historical information: "In the late 1970's, a five-line inscription was found on a grain silo in the ruins of Izbet Sarteh. When deciphered, it was found to contain a Philistine account of this battle, the capture of the ark, even specifically mentioning the priest Hophni."

1Samuel 4:12 ¶ 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.

1Samuel 4:13 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.

1Samuel 4:14 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.

1Samuel 4:15 Now Eli was ninety and eight years old; and his eyes were dim, that he could not see.

1Samuel 4:16 And the man said unto Eli, I *am* he that came out of the army, and I fled to day out of the army. And he said, What is there done, my son?

1Samuel 4:17 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.

1Samuel 4:18 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.

A soldier from the tribe of Benjamin ran back to Shiloh with his clothes rent and earth upon his head—signs of mourning. Eli was waiting for news because he was concerned about the ark of God. The man reported the news in the city first causing a great uproar. Eli heard the noise and wanted to know what was happening. The man hurried over to report to Eli. It is noted that he was 98 years old and was now blind.

The soldier told Eli that he had escaped to report on the fighting. He told Eli that Israel had been defeated with a great slaughter and that both his sons were dead. He then reported that the Philistines had taken the ark of God. At the mention of the ark of God, Eli fell off his seat and broke his neck because he was so heavy.

Eli had judged Israel for 40 years.

1Samuel 4:19 ¶ 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.

1Samuel 4:20 And about the time of her death the women that stood by her said unto her, Fear not; for thou hast born a son. But she answered not, neither did she regard *it*.

1Samuel 4:21 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.

1Samuel 4:22 And she said, The glory is departed from Israel: for the ark of God is taken.

Eli's daughter-in-law, the wife of Phinehas was pregnant and near the time of delivery when she heard that the ark of God was taken and that Eli and her husband were dead. The news caused her to go into labor, and she gave birth to a son. The delivery proved to be fatal to her, but she was able to name her child before dying. She named him Ichabod, which means, "where is the glory" or "there is no glory." She knew that the glory had departed from Israel because the ark of God had been taken.