

## 1 Samuel Chapter 04 Commentary

**1Sa 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. **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 cherubims: 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."

We go back to: **1Sa 3:21; 19 ¶** "And Samuel grew, and the LORD was with him, and did let none of his words fall to the ground. **20** And all Israel from Dan even to Beersheba knew that Samuel was established to be a prophet of the LORD. **21** And the LORD appeared again in Shiloh: for the LORD revealed himself to Samuel in Shiloh by the word of the LORD." To get the context of **1Sa 4:1** "And the word of Samuel came to all Israel." Samuel has already begun to speak to Israel, telling them the messages he has received from God.

Next, we see that Israel went out against the Philistines to battle. This does not say the Philistines came to do battle with Israel. Wherefore, we are led to believe that Israel is rising in rebellion from the Philistine rule over them. We were told in Judges that God had given them over to the rule of the Philistines; and at the close of Judges, their deliverance from under the Philistine rule had just begun with Samson.

Notice, Israel does not ask God if they should go to battle against the Philistines. Neither did they ask Samuel, the established prophet of God for Israel. The Philistines join Israel in battle and Israel is beaten. The elders of Israel ask why we are smitten. Notice, they did not ask God why they were smitten. They then decide to fetch the ark of God to save them.

Notice how this is worded: **1Sa 4:3** "*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.*" From the phrase "*it may save us*" it is easily seen; they have left God out of the equation. They are seeing the ark of God as a god, or an idol. When they view it in this light, there is no power in the ark of God, just as there is no power in any other idol.

Their next mistake was they brought it into their camp by improper means, seen in: **1Sa 4:4** "*So the people sent to Shiloh, that they might bring from thence the ark of the covenant of the LORD of hosts,*" They did not send for the Levites to bring the ark of God, according to God's word, but the people brought it. Hophni and Phinehas did accompany it, but there is no mention of the Levites being involved.

When they get the ark into their camp, they go into a frenzy, and the noise is so loud the Philistines hear it. This reminds us; there is always much ado, and noise, in the practice of idolatry, and in people going about doing their own will and ignoring God and Christ.

**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. **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."

The Philistines understood the great power of the God of Israel from what God did to Egypt. However, they do not know God in a regenerated way. The texts says that the Philistines were afraid. What does the scripture teach us about the unregenerate and the devil's people on earth? **Jas 2:19** "*Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble.*" Thus, we see the Philistines are afraid of God. Not willing to submit to God, but they fear his great power, which has already been demonstrated to the world.

**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."**

The Philistines hear the tumult and learn that the ark of the LORD was in the camp of Israel. Notice, the Philistines know the significance of God in the camp of the Israelites, because they know what God did to Egypt. They encouraged one another, and went to battle with the attitude: we do not want to be servants to the Israelites. The Philistines are victorious, because God was not in the camp of Israel, it was only the ark of the LORD, which Israel viewed in the perspective of an idol. We have no scripture, that tells us Israel ever asked God to be with them in this battle.

Now, we see the providence of God, fulfilling the prophesy of God to Eli, and of Eli to Samuel. Both of Eli's sons died in battle in the same day, just as God had said would happen.

**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."**

The man who fled the battle, and brought the news to Israel, is bearing the tidings of what happens when Israel is not worshipping God, nor asking God what they should do. This same thing is true in our own lives. You will never find that blessed rest of peace in your heart, as long as you are doing "that which is right in your own eyes" rather than "**thus saith the Lord.**" Just as Israel found out that going to battle without God, and trusting in what they had made into an idol, is a sure course to failure: so, if we believe in our own strength that we can overcome our enemy, the devil, or we go to battle against sin and Satan with some idol, we will always lose. Understand, Satan has more power than a mortal man, the key to the Christian's strength is Christ in us, the Holy Spirit; just as it was; the Holy Spirit moving upon Samson was what gave him the strength needed to overcome the Philistines.

We see more of the prophesy God gave to Eli, and to Samuel, being fulfilled in the death of Eli and his sons. It is not the end of the curse placed upon Eli's remaining family and their offspring. Did you notice? Eli showed no reaction to the announcement about his sons being slain. Why? God had already told him what was going to happen to them.

Eli's heart concern was for the ark of God. When he heard the ark of the Lord was taken, he fell off his seat backwards, which broke his neck and he died. For Eli, this was the announcement; his position in life as a Judge and priest were ended. His life's ministry was centered around the ark of God, and now it was gone from Israel. This was such a shock to Eli that he fell backward, which caused his death. Eli was a judge for forty years.

**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 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. 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."**

Phinehas's wife, who was great with child, hearing all these terrible tidings, goes into labor and delivers a son, whom she names Ichabod, and then she dies. She names him Ichabod, because she said, "**The glory is departed from Israel: for the ark of God is taken.**" We should be ashamed, when we feel the glory of the Lord is departed from our local church.

What a great warning to us; never forget that all that we are is because of Jesus Christ. A warning to not make an idol of our church buildings, nor our church bodies, nor ministers, or deacons or any other person, or any of the rituals of organized worship of God. A warning to us; if we make idols of our churches, or their membership, or their pastors and ministers, or the rituals of organized worship, the glory of God will depart from us also. What a sad thought, to have an organized church congregation, and a meeting place in which to gather and worship, and to feel like we assemble without the presence of Jesus.

Dear God in heaven, please; never let us forget to look to you, the praise you, to give thanks to you, to sing praise to you, to pray to you, for our continual sustenance in time. Through the Holy Spirit power, of Christ in us, help us to love one another, and to live the true Christian life to the full, which will bring glory and honor to your holy name. We thank you for your abundant mercy and blessing in our lives. We ask thy continued presence, and guidance, in the name of Jesus Christ, they beloved Son, Amen!