

I Samuel Lesson 04

I Samuel Chapter 4

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Memory verses for this week: *Phil 4:4 Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say, Rejoice. Phil 4:5 Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand.*

Introduction: We continue our study on Samuel this week. In last week's lesson, we studied about Samuel being called of God to become a prophet and priest. The first message the Lord gave to him was in regards to the judgment coming to Eli's house.

I. Samuel Becomes Prophet and Priest

1 Sam 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.

1 Sam 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.

Samuel was now the prophet of Israel and he speaks to ALL of Israel it says in verse 1. Certainly, all of God's people need to hear the word of the Lord. The nation prepares for war with the Philistine, and pitches their camp beside Ebenezer. This location was probably northeast of Joppa in the tribe of Ephraim. The Philistines pitched their camp in Aphek. The Philistines come in array against Israel, and the Philistines win the battle and slay 4,000 of the Israeli army in the initial battle.

1 Sam 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.

1 Sam 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.

It would seem unlikely that Israel could win this battle having Eli and his wicked sons as the head spiritual leaders of their nation. God through the mouth of Samuel had pronounced judgment for their sinfulness and defilement of the

tabernacle. Eli was still recognized as the spiritual judge/leader of the nation since Samuel was still very young. The people decide that God is displeased with them since he had allowed this great defeat to the Philistines. They question why this had happened, and decide to bring the ark of the covenant of the Lord out of Shiloh and bring it among them so that they might be saved out of the hands of their enemies. This would bring the presence of the Lord among them, and could cause things to change. They felt if the ark was among them, that God would be obligated to give them the victory. I believe their decision to seek the presence of God was wise.

When things go against us in life, we should pray and seek the Lord's face. But one of the things we fail to see in this is the prayer seeking the Lord's will. That should always be first and foremost in a Christian's life. God should not be our last line of hope, but we should seek His help first. The Israelites send down to Shiloh to have the ark brought forth, and since it was to be carried only by the priests, it is brought to them by Eli's sons, Hophni and Phinehas. They arrive in the camp bearing the ark on their shoulders. We mentioned last week that sometimes spiritual leaders are not even saved, much less following the guidelines laid down by the Lord. These men were very wicked, it showed great disrespect for the things of God to have them be the ones bearing the ark. God's work is a great work, and it should be done by saved individuals who are living holy and separated lives unto the Lord.

1 Sam 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.

The Israelites are encouraged as the ark is brought forth, and they receive it into the camp with a great shout. God's people have a reason to be excited when the presence of the Lord comes among them.

II. Israel's Defeat

1 Sam 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.

1 Sam 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.

1 Sam 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.

1 Sam 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.

1 Sam 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.

When the Philistines heard the shouting in the camp of Israel, they wondered what it meant. Surely this caused them to become alarmed when they found out that the ark of God had been brought down among the people. In verse 8, they question “Who shall deliver us out of the hand of these mighty Gods?” They did not understand that there was one and one only, the Great Jehovah God of Israel. But their concern was valid. They knew that this God had smitten the Egyptians and won many wars for Israel. And they knew how that they had been protected by God in the wilderness for the 40 years. They declare that they will be strong and fight like men, and not become servants to the Hebrews. Not only do they stand and fight, but they slay 30,000 of the Hebrews in the next battle.

III. The Ark of God is Taken

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

1 Sam 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.

1 Sam 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.

1 Sam 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.

In the conflict, the ark of God is taken and the two sons of Eli were slain. If you remember a couple of weeks back, we studied about the old prophet that came to Eli and told him what was going to happen. This is a fulfillment of both that prophecy and the first message God gave Samuel in chapter 3.

1 Sam 2:27 And there came a man of God unto Eli, and said unto him, Thus saith the LORD, Did I plainly appear unto the house of thy father, when they were in Egypt in Pharaoh's house?

1 Sam 2:28 And did I choose him out of all the tribes of Israel to be my priest, to offer upon mine altar, to burn incense, to wear an ephod before me? and did I give unto the house of thy father all the offerings made by fire of the children of Israel?

1 Sam 2:29 Wherefore kick ye at my sacrifice and at mine offering, which I have commanded in my habitation; and honourest thy sons above me, to make yourselves fat with the chiefest of all the offerings of Israel my

people?

1 Sam 2:30 Wherefore the LORD God of Israel saith, I said indeed that thy house, and the house of thy father, should walk before me for ever: but now the LORD saith, Be it far from me; for them that honour me I will honour, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed.

1 Sam 2:31 Behold, the days come, that I will cut off thine arm, and the arm of thy father's house, that there shall not be an old man in thine house.

1 Sam 2:32 And thou shalt see an enemy in my habitation, in all the wealth which God shall give Israel: and there shall not be an old man in thine house for ever.

1 Sam 2:33 And the man of thine, whom I shall not cut off from mine altar, shall be to consume thine eyes, and to grieve thine heart: and all the increase of thine house shall die in the flower of their age.

In verse 12, it says that a man from the tribe of Benjamin came running to Shiloh to bring the news of the disaster. He came in mourning, with dirt on his head. Eli, the old priest, was no doubt waiting anxiously to hear the news of the battle. It may have been that he had not wanted the ark of the Lord taken up to the place of the battle. He was now a very old man, and was blind and overweight. He took his seat beside the road to be the first to hear the news.

IV. Effect of the Bad News

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

1 Sam 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?

1 Sam 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.

1 Sam 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.

Eli's heart trembled at the word of the loss of the ark. He hears of how the Israelites have been defeated and both of his sons have been killed. And the ark of the Lord has been taken by the Philistines. This was too great a loss for Eli to bear, and he fell backwards at the mention of the loss of the ark, and it broke his neck. He had been judged of Israel for 40 years. Remember the words of coming judgment that he had recently received from Samuel.

1 Sam 3:11 And the LORD said to Samuel, Behold, I will do a thing in Israel, at which both the ears of every one that heareth it shall tingle.

1 Sam 3:12 In that day I will perform against Eli all things which I have spoken concerning his house: when I begin, I will also make an end.

1 Sam 3:13 For I have told him that I will judge his house for ever for the iniquity which he knoweth; because his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not.

1 Sam 3:14 And therefore I have sworn unto the house of Eli, that the iniquity of Eli's house shall not be purged with sacrifice nor offering for ever.

1 Sam 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.

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

1 Sam 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.

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

Eli is not the only member of his family affected by the bad news of the battle. The wife of Phinehas was with child, and almost ready to be delivered. At the announcement of Phinehas' death, she goes into labor and delivered a child. This premature death caused her to also die, and she named the child Ichabod. These words probably indicate that she was closer to the Lord than her husband. Ichabod lived on in Israel to adulthood, being mentioned again in the scriptures. This name Ichabod, was a very fitting name for the family of Eli.

It could apply to many churches and individuals today also. The word Ichabod meant "The glory is departed from Israel, because the ark of God was taken." It is sad when God departs from a church or an individual. We need to learn from this to always seek after the Lord, and never turn away from Him.

Matthew Henry made note of the pious nature of Phinehas' wife.

Note that she was a woman of a very gracious spirit though matched to a wicked husband. Her concern for the death of her husband and father-in-law was an evidence of her natural affection; but her much greater concern for the loss of the ark was an evidence of her pious and devout affection to God and sacred things. The former helped to hasten her travail, but it appears by her dying words that the latter lay nearer her heart (v. 22):

She said, The glory has departed from Israel, not lamenting so much the sinking of that particular family to which she was related as the general calamity of Israel in the captivity of the ark. This, this was it that was her grief, that was her death.

1. This made her regardless of her child. The women that attended her, who it is likely were some of the first rank in the city, encouraged her, and, thinking that her concern was mostly about the issue of her pains, when the child was born, said unto her, Fear not, now the worst is past, for thou has borne a son (and perhaps it was her first-born), but she answered not, neither did she regard it. The sorrows of her travail, if she had no other, would have been forgotten, for joy that a man-child was born into the world. Jn. 16:21. But what is that joy, (1.) To one that feels herself dying? No joy but that which is spiritual and divine will stand us in any stead then. Death is too serious a thing to admit the relish of any earthly joy; it is all flat and sapless then. (2.) What is it to one that is lamenting the loss of the ark? Small comfort could she have of a child born in Israel, in Shiloh, when the ark is lost, and is a prisoner in the land of the Philistines. What pleasure can we take in our creature-comforts and enjoyments if we want God's word and ordinances, especially if we want the comfort of his gracious presence and the light of his countenance?

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Prov 4:18 But the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.

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Practice Random Acts of Kindness. Each act spreads, and many will be blessed.