

## **Lecture #4 – Exposition of I Samuel 4-7**

### **Chapter 4 – The Ark of the Covenant is Lost**

#### **vs. 1-11 – The Battle of Aphek – 1122 B.C.**

“And the word of Samuel came to all Israel” – all Israel knew of the prophecy against Eli and his house.

The Philistines were a tribe of people living near the coast in the southwestern area of the Holy Land from roughly 1,200 to 600 B.C. Based on historical, archaeological, and DNA evidence it is now believed they were relatives of the ancient Greeks that settled around the time of the invasion of Egypt by the “sea peoples”. They were led by a confederacy of five city-states: Gaza, Ashkelon, Ashdod, Ekron, and Gath.

This appears to be yet another Philistine invasion. Their troops are massed at Aphek (“strength”)<sup>1</sup> and Israel gathers at Ebenezer (“stone of help”)<sup>2</sup>.

Warfare at this time is very primitive by today’s standards. There was no standard uniform or armament. The call for battle would go out and men of fighting age would gather. They brought their own weapons and armor if they had any. There was little organization beyond a primary leader or perhaps leaders over different types of weaponry. Generally, the two sides faced off until one moved forward and then they would clash. It was chaotic and brutal.

In the first encounter, 4,000 men of Israel are lost with presumably light casualties to their enemy. The people panic and send for the Ark of the Covenant. Taking the Ark into battle was not without precedent (Numbers 31:6, for example), however this instance seems rooted in idolatry as if the Ark were some sort of good luck charm.

As the people cheer the appearance of the Ark, the Philistines make a desperate preemptive attack. Israel is routed with 30,000 men dead. Hophni and Phinehas are slain, fulfilling the prophecy of I Samuel 2:34. The Ark is captured.

#### **vs. 12-18 – The Death of Eli**

Eli is at his post outside the gate of the Tabernacle awaiting news from the battle. Note that his primary concern appears to be the Ark. That is what his heart trembled for in vs. 13 and what precipitated his fall in vs. 18.

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<sup>1</sup> *Smith’s Bible Dictionary*

<sup>2</sup> *Smith’s Bible Dictionary*

The messenger (perhaps better described as a deserter from the disastrous battle) arrives and the news travels fast. Eli is unable to see the man, his appearance would have been enough to communicate the outcome with his rent clothes and dirt on his head.

The loss of the battle does not move Eli. Nor does the loss of so many men. Nor does the death of Hophni and Phinehas. But the loss of the Ark to the pagan Philistines is the shock that sends Eli tumbling to his death.

### vs. 19-22 – The Birth of Ichabod

A tragic coda to this event is the birth of Ichabod. Phinehas's wife went into labor after hearing the news about her husband and father-in-law. She gives birth to a son, and that joy cannot pierce her despair. She names the boy *Ichabod* ("no glory")<sup>3</sup> before dying.

NOTE – The outcome of the Battle of Aphek is disastrous. Wood writes:

"Excavations have revealed that the Philistines now moved directly into Israelite territory, even as far as Shiloh, which they destroyed (Jer. 7:12; 26:6). Probably it was now, too, that they first placed controlling garrisons in the country (1 Sam. 10:5; 13:3) and in a move to protect their own iron monopoly, destroyed what metal industry the Israelites may have had, making them completely dependent on the services of the Philistine smiths (1 Sam. 13:19-22).

"At such a time, Israelite morale must have been extremely low. It had seriously declined before this because of the deficient religious condition, but this would have reduced it still more, crushing people's spirits to the point of despair. Israel twice had been severely defeated, losing many men and now the ark. The Philistines controlled vast areas of the land. No doubt it seemed to many that the days of Israelite independence were at an end. This foreign power would swallow them completely."<sup>4</sup>

As Wood noted, it appears that the Philistine advance also overtook and destroyed Shiloh at this time. The Ark will not reunite with the Tabernacle again.

Why did God allow this? Psalm 78 gives us the answer: it was judgment against the people's idolatry. See Psalm 78:56-64.

## **Chapter 5 – The Ark of the Covenant in Philistia**

### vs. 1-12 – The Ark in Philistia

The Ark was kept as a trophy of war for seven months (I Samuel 6:1). At first it was taken to Ashdod and placed in the Temple of Dagon. Dagon was considered the father of Baal and his worship was

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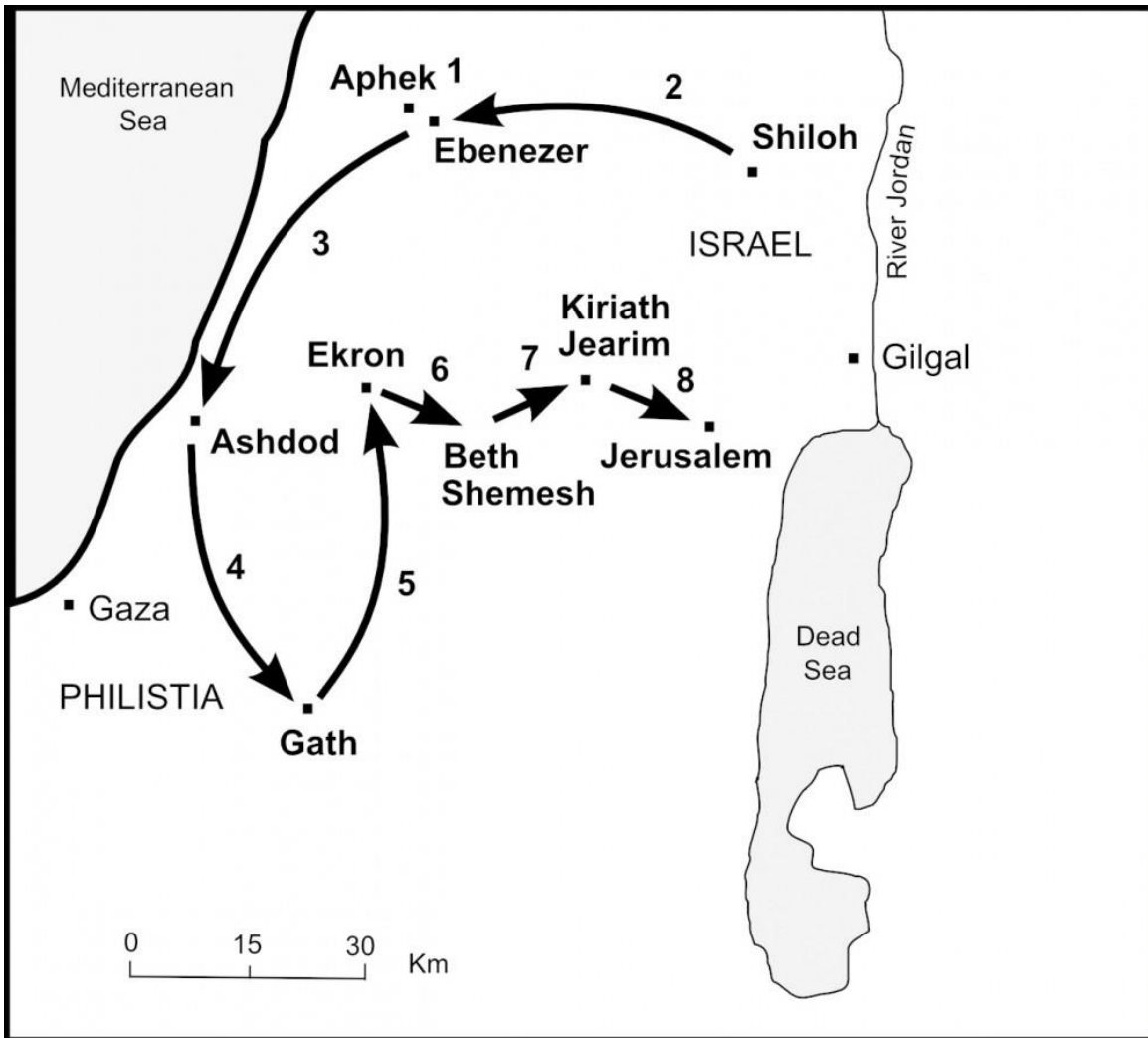
<sup>3</sup> *Bible History: Old Testament* by Alfred Edersheim. Book 4, p. 20

<sup>4</sup> *A Survey of Israel's History* by Leon Wood. p. 192-193.

widespread throughout Mesopotamia. The image to the right is an Assyrian depiction of this false deity.<sup>5</sup>



God curses the Philistines by humiliating their god by breaking its image before the Ark and sending a plague of hemorrhoids (*emerods*).



The Philistines try to stay the judgment of God by sending the Ark to another of their capitals, Gath, with the same results. When they tried to send it to Ekron the people refused it. It was decided to send it back to Israel.

## **Chapter 6 – The Ark of the Covenant is Returned**

### **vs. 1-9 – The Plan of The Philistines**

<sup>5</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dagon#/media/File:Fig39dagon\\_knecht.png](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dagon#/media/File:Fig39dagon_knecht.png) – accessed 8-22-22

Gaebelein writes:

“Now they plot to get rid of the ark and of Him whose hand rested so heavily in judgment upon them. The advice of the heathen priests and diviners is that the ark should be sent away with votive offerings of gold, representing that which had plagued them. This was a heathen custom,... And as these Philistine priests had some knowledge of God’s judgment upon Egypt they added to their counsel a warning reminding them of Pharaoh and Egypt. Their unbelief and superstition are manifested by the way they returned the ark.”<sup>6</sup>

Concerning the use of the two milk cows, Carroll writes:

“...But as there still might be a question as to whether these afflictions were natural or supernatural, they tested it in this way: They went to the pen where were cows with young calves (you know what a fool a cow is over her first calf when it is little) and hitched two of these cows to a cart, put the Ark on it, to see if the cows, against nature, would go away and leave their calves willingly, and still thinking about the calves and calling them, would carry the Ark back to some city of the Levites; that would show that Jehovah was in it.

“That was a pretty wise idea of those Philistines, and so when they took a new cart and put the Ark on it, and took those two mother cows, they never hesitated but struck a beeline for the nearest Levite city, about twelve miles, and they went bellowing, showing that they felt the absence from their calves....”<sup>7</sup>

### vs. 10-21 – The Sin of Bethshemesh

Bethshemesh (“house of the sun”)<sup>8</sup> was a city of Levites (Joshua 21:16) in the territory of Dan. The time of year is stated in vs. 13 as being during the wheat harvest, so perhaps May-June.

The Ark was only seen by the High Priest on the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16:2), and that through a cloud of incense. When it was moved it was covered (Numbers 4:4-6). Perhaps it was curiosity that led them to open the Ark. Perhaps it was a concern that the Philistines may have desecrated it. Whatever the reasons, they disobeyed the commandment of the Lord concerning His holy things (Numbers 4:20).

The number slain by God in vs. 19 is a source of debate. Reese has one of the best explanations: “Many people have found issue with this verse, thinking the number 50,070 would be too high for a small village population. However, the Hebrew text separates out 50,000 Philistines (I Sa 5:11) and 70 men of Bethshemesh, to indicate the total number afflicted.”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> *Annotated Bible* by A.C. Gaebelein. E-Sword module.

<sup>7</sup> *An Interpretation of the English Bible: The Hebrew Monarchy*, by B.H. Carroll. p. 28

<sup>8</sup> *Easton’s Bible Dictionary*

<sup>9</sup> *The Reese Chronological Study Bible*, p. 376

## **Chapter 7 – The Revival at Mizpeh**

### **vs. 1-2 – The Ark at Kirjathjearim**

Kirjathjearim means “city of woods or forests”<sup>10</sup>

The “twenty years” is not the total time the Ark was at Kirjathjearim. This merely marks the passage of 20 years between vs. 2 and 3. The total time the Ark stayed there was roughly 75 years (1121-1046 B.C. says Reese)

### **vs. 3-12 – Revival and Deliverance at Mizpeh**

Twenty years after the Ark was lost and returned, Samuel leads the people in revival at Mizpeh (“watch tower”)<sup>11</sup>. He exhorts them to turn from Ashtaroath and Baal.

Baal was one of the more popular false gods in ancient Israel. He is associated with storms and fertility. He was highly adaptable with many localized versions. His name means literally “lord” or “master”.

Ashtaroath was a false goddess often seen in conjunction with Baal. She was the Canaanite version of the Phoenician *Astarte*, the Babylonian *Ishtar*, and the Sumerian *Inanna*. She was associated with fertility and the moon, and her worship was of the basest debauchery.

I think too little emphasis is placed on the events seen here. The spiritual revival and military victory established the setting for the people to demand a monarchy. The events of this chapter cannot be understated.

Gaebelein writes:

“Samuel now is seen beginning his great national ministry. The message he brings is the message of repentance and the assurance of faith. In simple words he addressed the people, who no doubt were prepared for it by their long period of humiliation. He demands that their true return to the Lord must be practical; the strange gods and Ashtaroath must be put away. If they serve the Lord only, deliverance out of the hands of the Philistines would come. The message was at once obeyed. Every true return to the Lord must manifest itself in the same way. True repentance without self-judgment and self-surrender is impossible. The earnest appeal and whole-hearted response by the people led to the great gathering at Mizpah (the watch tower). It was a day of humiliation and prayer. Samuel said “I will pray unto the Lord for you.” He was the child of prayer and the man of prayer (8:6; 12:19, 23). “Samuel among them that call upon His name; they called upon the LORD and He answered them” (Psalm 99:6). There was confession of sin and they drew water, and poured it out before Jehovah. It was a symbolical act showing the undone and helpless condition of Israel. ‘We must needs die, and are as water spilt on the ground’ (2 Samuel 14:14). When the Philistines came up against them they were afraid and acknowledged prayer as their only

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<sup>10</sup> *Easton's Bible Dictionary*


<sup>11</sup> *Smith's Bible Dictionary*

refuge and help. ‘Cease not’ they appealed to Samuel, “to cry for us unto the LORD our God.” And afterwards he offered a whole burnt offering unto the Lord. This offering represents Christ. Then Samuel cried unto the LORD and the LORD answered him. The elements of a true return unto the Lord and a true revival among God’s people are found in this great national movement.”<sup>12</sup>

The setting for the unexpected battle is described by Edersheim:

“The assembly had met in Mizpeh, not with any thought of war, far less in preparation for it. In fact, when Israel in Mizpeh heard of the hostile approach of the Philistines, ‘they were afraid’ (ver. 7). But as rebellion had caused their desertion, so would return bring them help from the Lord. As so generally in this history, all would happen naturally in the ordinary succession of cause and effect; and yet all would be really and directly of God in the ordering and arrangement of events. Israel must not go to war, nor must victory be clue to their own prowess. It must be all of God, and the Philistines must rush on their own fate. Yet it was quite natural that when the Philistines heard of this grand national gathering at Mizpeh, after twenty years of unattempted resistance to their rule, they should wish to anticipate their movements; and that, whether they regarded the assembly as a revival of distinctively national religion or as preparatory for war. Similarly, it was natural that they would go on this expedition not without serious misgivings as to the power of the God of Israel which they had experienced during the stay of the ark in their land; and that in this state of mind they would be prepared to regard any terrible phenomenon in nature as His interposition, and be affected accordingly.

“All this actually took place, but its real causes lay deeper than appeared on the surface. While Israel trembled at the approach of the Philistines, Samuel prayed, and Jehovah answered him.’ The great thunder-storm on that day, which filled the Philistines with panic, was really the Lord’s thundering. It was a wild mass of fugitives against which Israel went out from Mizpeh, and whom they pursued and smote until under the broad meadows of Beth-car, ‘the house of the lamb.’ And it was to mark not only the victory, but its cause and meaning, that Samuel placed the memorial-stone on the scene of this rout, between ‘the look out’ and Shen, ‘the tooth,’ probably a rocky crag on the heights down which the Philistines were hurled in their flight. That stone he named ‘Eben-ezer, saying, Hitherto hath Jehovah helped us.’”<sup>13</sup>

 Judges 16:23-31 – Samson’s death<sup>14</sup>

### vs. 13-17 – Condition of Israel Before the Monarchy

Israel is at a high point as the time of the Judges closes. The Philistines were subdued, and Israel reclaimed much of the captured territory. Samuel is the great national and spiritual leader of the day, though he is likely approaching 60 years of age.

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<sup>12</sup> *Annotated Bible* by A.C. Gaebelein. E-Sword module.

<sup>13</sup> *Bible History: Old Testament* by Alfred Edersheim. Book 4, p. 28-29

<sup>14</sup> Reese dates Samson’s death to 1101 B.C, just before the great victory at Mizpeh.