

# 1st Samuel

## Lesson 8

### (3) Philistines Take the Power of the Ark of the Covenant (4:10-11)

But the Philistines did take courage. We see next that the Philistines take the Power of the Ark of the Covenant. We also see that the LORD uses them to fulfill His message to Eli. Verse 10. *“So the Philistines fought, and Israel was defeated, and every man fled to his tent; and the slaughter was very great, for there fell of Israel thirty-thousand-foot soldiers. <sup>11</sup> And the ark of God was taken; and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, died.”* (4:10-11)

Thirty-two thousand Israelites died trying to defeat the Philistines. What was the result? They lost the Ark they brought into the camp, and the two priests died on the same day. We did not know that the Ark was going to be lost. The LORD never revealed that point. All we knew was that something was going to happen that would *tingle the ears* of the Nation of Israel. The deaths of the two priests would not have done that.

#### (a) The Announcement of the Report (4:12-17)

Alas, we come to the announcement of the report of the great loss back in Shiloh and all that happened there. Verse 12. *“Now a man of Benjamin ran from the battle line and came to Shiloh the same day with his clothes torn and dust on his head. <sup>13</sup> When he came, behold, Eli was sitting on his seat by the road eagerly watching, because his heart was trembling for the ark of God. So the man came to tell it in the city, and all the city cried out. <sup>14</sup> When Eli heard the noise of the outcry, he said, “What does the noise of this commotion mean?” Then the man came hurriedly and told Eli. <sup>15</sup> Now Eli was ninety-eight years old, and his eyes were set so that he could not see. <sup>16</sup> The man said to Eli, “I am the one who came from the battle line. Indeed, I escaped from the battle line today.” And he said, “How did things go, my son?” <sup>17</sup> Then the one who brought the news replied, “Israel has fled before the Philistines and there has also been a great slaughter among the people, and your two sons also, Hophni and Phinehas, are dead, and the ark of God has been taken.”* (4:12-17)

It is interesting that in this story, Samuel plainly states that Eli was more concerned about the Ark than anything else. He first heard that Israel had fled before the Philistines. He then heard of the great slaughter. Next, he heard of the deaths of his two sons. But finally, he heard about the loss of the Ark.

#### (b) The Result of the Report

##### (i) The Death of Eli (4:18)

What was the result of the report? It was the death of Eli. But what was the key that caused Eli's death? Verse 18. *“When he mentioned the ark of God, Eli fell off the seat backward beside the gate, and his neck was broken and he died, for he was old and heavy. Thus he judged Israel forty years.”* (4:18)

Picture this in your mind. Eli was unmoved by all the news. He was unmoved by the loss of the battle. He was unmoved by the loss of the soldiers. He was unmoved by the loss of his sons. But when he heard about the Ark, he was moved. There, on that same day as his son's deaths, Eli died at the age of ninety-eight years old and had served as the High Priest for forty years. But that was not the end of the LORD's punishment on Eli and his family.

##### (ii) The Birth of Ichabod (4:19-22)

Samuel tells us about the birth of Ichabod, Eli's grandson, and the death of Ichabod's mother. Verse 19. *“Now his daughter-in-law, Phinehas's wife, was pregnant and about to give birth; and when she heard the news that the ark of God was taken and that her father-in-law and her husband had died, she kneeled down and gave birth, for her pains came upon her. <sup>20</sup> And about the time of her death the women who stood by her said to her, “Do not be afraid, for you have given birth to a son.” But she did not answer or pay attention. <sup>21</sup> And she called the boy*

*Ichabod, saying, "The glory has departed from Israel," because the ark of God was taken and because of her father-in-law and her husband. 22 She said, "The glory has departed from Israel, for the ark of God was taken."* (4:19-22)

Something that seems to be hidden in the Old Testament can be found in these last few verses. What is that? We see it in the last sentence, *"The glory has departed from Israel, for the ark of God was taken."* The glory of the Nation of Israel was the Ark of the Covenant. The word glory is interesting. The meaning of the Hebrew word means *weight* or *something substantial*. It also connotes *honor* and *fame*. The substantial weight of the honor and fame in Israel was the Ark of the Covenant. When it was taken from Israel, the substantial weight of the honor and fame of Israel had departed. The dying mother gave her son a name – Ichabod. The name in Hebrew means *inglorious*. The word means *dishonorable*. For life, Ichabod had to carry around the name *dishonorable*. Why? It was because of the unchecked sin of his father, uncle, and Eli, the High Priest. On that day, the line of Eli never held the High Priest office again. In addition, Eli's descendants would never have direct access to the blessings of the offerings that were normally extended to the priests even though some of Eli's descendants were afforded the right to wear the ephod, but not with the honor of those who served in Shiloh or even later in the Tabernacle. Upon Eli's death, the priestly line was transferred to Zadok. Zadok's descendants held the High Priest line until Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Solomon's Temple about 586 BC.

Before we turn the page to chapter 5, we must address the future of the location of Shiloh. The Ark was gone from the Tabernacle and would never return to Shiloh. What happened to Shiloh? Three passages tell us the end of the story for Shiloh. First, we look at Psalm 78:58-64. Speaking about the LORD, the psalm says the following.

*"For they provoked Him with their high places And aroused His jealousy with their graven images. When God heard, He was filled with wrath And greatly abhorred Israel; So that He abandoned the dwelling place at Shiloh, The tent which He had pitched among men, And gave up His strength to captivity And His glory into the hand of the adversary. He also delivered His people to the sword And was filled with wrath at His inheritance. Fire devoured His young men, And His virgins had no wedding songs. His priests fell by the sword, And His widows could not weep."* Psalm 78:58-64

With this passage in mind, with the death of Eli, his sons, and the capture of the Ark, the LORD intended to and did abandon Shiloh.

Next, we look at Jeremiah 7:12. As the LORD has Nebuchadnezzar outside the city of Jerusalem, ready take the city and destroy it, the LORD said the following. *"But go now to My place which was in Shiloh, where I made My name dwell at the first, and see what I did to it because of the wickedness of My people Israel."* (Jeremiah 7:12)

In other words, the LORD says, *if you want to see what is about to happen to Jerusalem, go look at what is left of Shiloh.*

Then, in the last passage, we look at Jeremiah 26:9. Here the people are reacting to the prophecy of Jeremiah.

*"The priests and the prophets and all the people heard Jeremiah speaking these words in the house of the LORD. When Jeremiah finished speaking all that the LORD had commanded him to speak to all the people, the priests and the prophets and all the people seized him, saying, "You must die! "Why have you prophesied in the name of the LORD saying, 'This house will be like Shiloh and this city will be desolate, without inhabitant?'" And all the people gathered about Jeremiah in the house of the LORD."* (Jeremiah 26:7-9)

Jeremiah has prophesied that Jerusalem would be like Shiloh after Nebuchadnezzar is through with it. This caused the people to want Jeremiah dead. The truth is, Jerusalem will be destroyed. By the time of Jeremiah, nothing remained at Shiloh. While the Tabernacle complex was at Shiloh, everything was temporary. The living structures were nothing more than tents. At the time of Jeremiah, if you visited Shiloh, the landscape was wiped clean. That is precisely what Jeremiah was trying to convey. He wants the people to know that the LORD intends to wipe Jeremiah clean.

## Chapter 5

### (4) Philistines Experience the Power of the Ark of the Covenant

#### (a) Dagon Destroyed (5:1-5)

As the Philistines took the Ark away from the Israelites, with the turn of the page to chapter 5, the Philistines would soon experience the power of the Ark of the Covenant when the Philistines found their god, Dagon, destroyed. Chapter 5, verse 1. *“Now the Philistines took the ark of God and brought it from Ebenezer to Ashdod. <sup>2</sup> Then the Philistines took the ark of God and brought it to the house of Dagon and set it by Dagon. <sup>3</sup> When the Ashdodites arose early the next morning, behold, Dagon had fallen on his face to the ground before the ark of the LORD. So they took Dagon and set him in his place again. <sup>4</sup> But when they arose early the next morning, behold, Dagon had fallen on his face to the ground before the ark of the LORD. And the head of Dagon and both the palms of his hands were cut off on the threshold; only the trunk of Dagon was left to him. <sup>5</sup> Therefore neither the priests of Dagon nor all who enter Dagon’s house tread on the threshold of Dagon in Ashdod to this day.”* (5:1-5)

If you remember, we met Dagon in Judges 16:23-24 where the Philistines credited Dagon, their fish god, with the capture of Samson. There we reported the following about the worship of Dagon.

As in all ancient worship, the people were required to make specific offerings to their false gods at specific times of the year. In the passage [Judges 16:23-24 ], it was time *“for a great sacrifice to Dagon.”* The Philistines worshiped primarily two gods, Dagon (the fish god) and Beelzebub (the lord of the flies and the name of Satan). Here the worship is to Dagon. This god was worshipped in Gaza and Ashdod (1 Samuel 5:2-7). The first part of Dagon, Dag, means *fish* in Hebrew. Dagon was his Hebrew name. The statue of Dagon had hands, breast, and a head of a man, and the rest of the body was a fish. Hence, the hands of Dagon are mentioned in 1 Samuel 5:4, but not his feet. He was the emblem of fertility and productiveness for the sea-going people. You can find the image of this god on ancient Philistine and Phoenician coins in museums. You can also see it on Assyrian gems in the British Museum.

The destruction of Dagon recorded in our Samuel passage brought great fear on the Philistines that the writer tells us, *“Therefore neither the priests of Dagon nor all who enter Dagon’s house tread on the threshold of Dagon in Ashdod to this day.”* When the priest and the Philistine people entered Dagon’s temple to worship, they stepped over the door threshold, careful not to step on it as they entered. All of this information was just a memory of Samuel as he was recording it for the LORD years after it transpired.

#### (b) Tumor Ravaged

##### (i) Philistines Afflicted by the Ark (5:6)

The Ark brought great fear to the Philistines with the destruction of their god; it did not cause them to find the need to return it to Israel immediately. But that will change soon when the Philistines become tumor ravaged as the Philistines are afflicted by the Ark. Verse 6. *“Now the hand*

*of the LORD was heavy on the Ashdodites, and He ravaged them and smote them with tumors, both Ashdod and its territories.” (5:6)*

Ashdod was one of the five major cities in the Philistine area called the Gaza Strip today. It is called that because it is a narrow strip of land that runs north to south along the Mediterranean Sea. It is about seven miles wide and thirty-two miles long. It has been the same dimensions for most of its existence from antiquities until now. As with the cities in the Promised Land, each city was a protected fortress for many small unwalled villages in its vicinity. The same was the case with Ashdod, Ekron, Gaza, Ashkelon, and Gath.

Ashdod sat on the coastline almost directly in the center of the Philistine territory with about sixteen miles to the north and sixteen miles to the south. It was the perfect place for the temple of Dagon. Centrally located, it was easy for all Philistines to visit from time to time.

What did these *tumors* look like? The Hebrew word is *ophel*, and the best English translation is *bleeding hemorrhoids*. The King James Version of the Bible called them *emerods*, which was the English word for *hemorrhoids*, in 1611. Interestingly, the word *ophel* was not allowed to be read in the Synagogues. When the priest came to this word in the reading of this verse, he would pronounce it as *teborim*. Moses had used the word *teborim* to explain one of the plagues of Egypt in Deuteronomy 28:27. Both words mean *swelling turnouts*. Not fit for public reading, the word tumor has now been substituted. No doubt, the tumors hemorrhoids were present in men throughout the Philistine territory.

#### (ii) Philistines Complain about the Ark (5:7-8a)

It did not take long for the Philistines to put two and two together to blame their loathsome, painful, bleeding hemorrhoids on the Ark of the Covenant. Samuel writes how the Philistines complain about the Ark. Verse 7. *“When the men of Ashdod saw that it was so, they said, “The ark of the God of Israel must not remain with us, for His hand is severe on us and on Dagon our god.”<sup>8</sup> So they sent and gathered all the lords of the Philistines to them and said, “What shall we do with the ark of the God of Israel?” (5:7-8a)*

*“What shall we do with the ark of the God of Israel?”* The Philistines wanted a plan made and made quickly. They tried to get rid of the Ark as soon as possible.

#### (iii) Philistines Relocation the Ark (5:8b-9)

Thus, the five lords of the Philistines made a decision. Samuel writes of the Philistine’s relocation of the Ark. Verse 8b. *“And they said, “Let the ark of the God of Israel be brought around to Gath.” And they brought the ark of the God of Israel around.<sup>9</sup> After they had brought it around, the hand of the LORD was against the city with very great confusion; and He smote the men of the city, both young and old, so that tumors broke out on them.” (5:8b-9)*

From Ashdod, the LORD’s sent the Ark to Gath. Gath was directly east of Ashdod, about six miles away, on the eastern border of the Philistine land, next to the border with the tribe of Judah. As we read, with the reception of the Ark in Gath, the men and boys of Gath developed the same bleeding hemorrhoids as was felt in Ashdod.

#### (iv) Philistines Transfer the Ark (5:10-12)

Gath was just as troubled with the Ark as Ashdod, so Samuel tells us of the Philistine transfer of the Ark to Ekron. Verse 10. *“So they sent the ark of God to Ekron. And as the ark of God came to Ekron the Ekronites cried out, saying, “They have brought the ark of the God of Israel around to us, to kill us and our people.”<sup>11</sup> They sent therefore and gathered all the lords of the Philistines and said, “Send away the ark of the God of Israel, and let it return to its own place so that it will not kill us and our people.” For there was a deadly confusion throughout the city; the hand of God was very heavy there.<sup>12</sup> And the men who did not die were smitten with tumors and the cry of the city went up to heaven.” (5:10-12)*

Ekron was the northernmost city still in the Philistine land. It sat near the eastern border of Philistia, right within a mile of Judah’s tribal border. As we read, the reputation of the Ark preceded

its arrival. The people did not want it in Ekron, and it did not take long for their fears to be fulfilled. In Ekron, the same plague of bleeding hemorrhoids arrives, and many die. It caused the Ekronites to cry out to heaven for help.

## Chapter 6

### (v) Philistines Return the Ark

#### (a) The Discussion to Return the Ark (6:1-2)

With the turn of the page to chapter 6, Samuel explains the details of the Philistines return of the Ark by telling us about the discussion to return the Ark. Chapter 5, verse 1. *“Now the ark of the LORD had been in the country of the Philistines seven months. <sup>2</sup> And the Philistines called for the priests and the diviners, saying, “What shall we do with the ark of the LORD? Tell us how we shall send it to its place.” (6:1-2)*

First, Samuel tells us that the Ark had been out of the hands of the Israelites for seven months. Second, the Philistines did not go back to the lords of Philistia to get rid of the Ark; they went to the false priests and diviners. The priests were, of course, the priests of Dagon or Beelzebub. But who were the diviners? What were diviners? We learned of *diviners* in the book of Genesis and Deuteronomy. The Hebrew word is *qasam*. It means *a person who foretells by some supernatural or magical way the future or discovers what is hidden or obscure*. The diviner has the power to foresee or predict. The priests and the diviners were some of the most respected, if not feared, people in every community. They were thought of as being on a level far above everyone else, except for the lords of each community. Philistia had five major cities at the time that cared for all the little villages out and about. Each city had a lord; therefore, there were five lords of the Philistines. Samuel told us this fact in Judges 3:3. We are about to learn it again in verse 6. We do know how many priests and diviners there were in Philistia, but many to be assured.