

THRU BIBLE

1 Samuel 4–6 | “The Journeys of the Ark of the Covenant”

I. THE CAPTURE OF THE ARK. (4)

A. (v. 1)

1. “...Now Israel went out against the Philistines to battle,...”

a. “the Philistines”

- 1) The Philistines were not native to the land of Canaan, but they arrived in two migrations from the Aegean Sea area.
 - a) The first migration was about 2000 B.C.
 - b) The second migration was about 1200 B.C.
- 2) The kings of the Philistines were city-state rulers, not country rulers. The king of Gath being the first among equals.
 - a) In Hebrew, the kings were referred to as *Seren*. The normal word in Hebrew is *melch*, but when they refer to the Philistine kings, they called them *seren* (which is in the Greek *turranos* [“absolute ruler”], which is where we get our English word “tyrant.”

- b. **NOTE:** It could be that Samson died by this time, so now Israel is going to fight the Philistines from expanding their territory.

2. “...and pitched beside Ebenezer: and the Philistines pitched in Aphek.

a. “Ebenezer”

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- 1) This is named here proleptically by the author because it was not the name of that place in that point of time, but it will be called Ebenezer later (7:12).

B. (v. 3)

1. ***“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.”***

a. *“Wherefore hath the LORD smitten us to day before the Philistines?”*

- 1) They blamed God for their trouble.

- a) How often I hear people charging God foolishly! They blame God whenever something goes bad in their lives.

- 2) They didn’t seek the Lord, but just made a foolish decision.

- a) It is important that we seek the mind of the Lord and His will, and not just step our presumptuously.

b. The elders are basically saying, “Let the Ark save us out of the hand of the enemies,” and in that, they made 2 THEOLOGICAL ERRORS:

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- 1) They failed theologically in regards to the OMNIPRESENCE of God.
 - a) In the past, the Ark did represent the presence of God in battle ([Num. 10:35-36](#); [Josh 6:6-7](#)), however, the Ark was not permanently settled in a permanent home yet. Now it has been settled in Shiloh.
 - b) **KEY:** They failed to distinguish the Ark as a symbol of God’s presence and actual presence of God.
 - i. Cf. [Exodus 25:22](#); [2 Sam. 6:2](#); [Psalm 80:1](#)
 - ii. Like the pagan world brought their idols into battle ([2 Sam. 5:21](#); [1 Chron. 14:12](#)), the Jews brought the Ark of God into battle.
 - iii. **NOTE:** If they had been obedient to the Lord, God would have been with Israel regardless of where the Ark was. ([Psalm 139:7-10](#); [Jeremiah 23:23-24](#)).
 - iv. **KEY:** They failed to recognize the implications of the omnipresence of God. If they would have been obedient and repentant, then God would have defeated the Philistines regardless of where the Ark may have been.
- 2) They also failed theologically in regards to the OMNIPOTENCE of God.

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- a) They were trying to use the Ark of the Covenant as a good luck charm. They believed that the power was in the Ark rather than in God.

C. (v. 4)

1. **“...the ark of the covenant of the LORD of hosts, which dwelleth between the cherubims:...”**

- a. The Shechinah glory was between the cherubim of the Ark here on earth ([Exodus 25:22](#)), but God Himself was enthroned above the cherubim in heaven ([2 Samuel 6:2](#); [Psalm 80:1](#); [99:1](#); [Ezekiel 1:4-28](#); [Rev. 4:6-9](#)).

D. (v. 8)

1. **“...these are the Gods that smote the Egyptians with all the plagues in the wilderness.”**

- a. Over 3 centuries¹ after the 10 plagues in Egypt, the pagan world still knew about it!
- b. “Gods” - The Philistines refer to the God of Israel in polytheistic terms.

E. (v. 11)

1. **“And the ark of God was taken; and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were slain.”**

¹ The Exodus happened in 1446 B.C., and Eli died in about 1091 B.C., thus about 355 years after the plagues of Egypt, the Philistines still heard about those events.

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- a. The Results of these events:
 - 1) The town of Shiloh was destroyed.
 - a) Cf. **Psalm 78:59-64; Jeremiah 7:12-15; 26:6, 9**
 - 2) The Tabernacle was moved to the town of Nob.
 - a) The ancient site of Nob is identified as Al-Issawiya, just outside East Jerusalem on the eastern slopes of Mount Scopus overlooking Jerusalem.²
 - b) They couldn't go into Jerusalem since it was still in Jebusite hands.
 - 3) The Philistines exercised effective control over the central part of the country.
 - a) They maintain control until Saul and Jonathan finally chase them out of the area.
 - 4) The country is divided in two because the Philistines have taken control of the Valley of Jezreel and the city of Bethshan (**29:1; 31:10**).
 - 5) The Philistines now control the whole of the Via Maris, the ancient trade route linking Egypt and Mesopotamia.
 - a) By means of this control, they are the ones becoming wealthy in the economics of that day.

² DMS 31° 47' 55" N, 35° 14' 54" E Decimal 31.798611, 35.248333

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F. (v. 12)

1. **“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.”**

a. *“a man of Benjamin”*

1) Tradition tells us that it was Saul since he is mentioned as a Benjaminite, but I think the writer would have identified him as Saul if it was indeed him.

b. *“and came to Shiloh”*

1) This was about a 20 mile journey from Aphek, all uphill.

2) This shows the urgency of the man wanting to bring the report to Eli.

G. (v. 21)

1. **“*Ichabod*”** - Heb. *“No Glory; Inglorious”*

2. **“...*The glory is departed from Israel...*”**

a. *“departed”* - Heb. *“exiled; carried captive”*

1) She is saying that the Shechinah glory has gone into exile from Israel.

2) However, her assumptions are not quite right.

a) The Ark has been taken, but only temporarily.

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b) The Shechinah glory has not departed from Israel.

i. This will not happen until the days of Ezekiel ([Ezek. 8–11](#)).

b. **NOTE:** Eli’s daughter-in-law made the same theological errors as the elders ([v. 3](#)).

c. **KEY:** It is so important that we as Christians sense, and are aware of, the presence of God.

1) It is tragic when we lose the consciousness of the presence of God, and try to replace it with relics or material things that remind us of His presence.

a) I believe that the modern church today is trying to manufacture God’s presence by creating an atmosphere or vibe of God’s presence in the sanctuary (light shows, concert-type venues, etc.), and that is no different than the Israelites relating the Ark as a substitute for God’s presence.

b) One mistake we often make is when we think that God is at the “Church” building.

c) Or we think, “I need to go back to that exact place where I experienced the presence of God in the past to feel it again,” which just reveals that we are relating our experience to the place and not to God Himself.

2) The reality is that He is always with us!!

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- a) Cf. [Acts 17:28](#) - Paul told those at Mars Hill in Athens, “*For in Him we live, and move, and have our being...*”

II. THE ARK IN THE LAND OF THE PHILISTINES. (5)

ASHDOD (v. 1-7)

A. (v. 2)

1. **“When the Philistines took the ark of God, they brought it into the house of Dagon, and set it by Dagon.”**

- a. *Dagon* was the Canaanite god of grain, and became the adopted, national god of the Philistines.
- b. *Dagon* had human hands and head, but the body and tail of a fish.
- c. The common pagan practice was that if you captured another nation's god in battle, you would place it in with your gods, thus they put the Ark of God in with their god *Dagon*.



B. (v. 6)

1. **“Therefore neither the priests of Dagon, nor any that come into Dagon's house, tread on the threshold of Dagon in Ashdod unto this day.”**
 - a. Because *Dagon* fell down before the Ark of God and its head and hands were broken off laying on the threshold, this began the tradition of anyone coming

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into the room of Dagon would jump over the threshold to come in ([Zephaniah 1:9](#)).

- b. “*unto this day*” = the day that the author wrote 1 & 2 Samuel.

C. (v. 6)

1. **“*But the hand of the LORD was heavy upon them of Ashdod, and he destroyed them, and smote them with emerods, even Ashdod and the coasts thereof.*”**

- a. “*emerods*” - Heb. “*hemorrhoids; tumors; mounds; whirls; swellings*” in the rectal area.

1) From the 2 Hebrew words:

- a) Heb. *techorim* - “*boils; ulcers; tumors [in the anus or pudenda]*”, with the root meaning “*to burn*”.
- b) Heb. *ophelim* - “*tumor; hill; fort; stronghold*”

2) The old English word *emerods* is an archaic term for *hemorrhoids*.

- a) We will see the Philistines in Gath get “*emerods in their secret parts.*” ([v. 9](#))

3) The Philistines associated these *emerods* with rats ([6:4](#)), which suggests that this was the bubonic plague.

- b. What we know about this disease:

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- 1) Everybody was affected. (5:9)
 - 2) The condition was heavy (5:6), devastating (5:6, 9), sore (5:7), lethal (5:11), and caused a great panic (5:12).
 - 3) They were in the “*secret parts*”, or groin/anal area. (6:4)
 - 4) Rats were somehow involved in this plague. (6:4)
 - 5) They suffered with it for 7 months. (6:1)
 - 6) They associated it with the Plagues of Egypt. (6:6)
 - 7) This does not sound fun!!
- c. The God of Israel is showing the Philistines that:
- 1) He is superior to their god Dagon.
 - 2) He does not take lightly the disobedience of man.
 - 3) He is the God of Israel.
 - 4) If you don’t follow the God of Israel, it will be a real pain in the rear!

GATH (v. 8-9)

D. (v. 8)

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1. “They sent therefore and gathered all the lords of the Philistines unto them, and said, What shall we do with the ark of the God of Israel? And they answered, Let the ark of the God of Israel be carried about unto Gath. And they carried the ark of the God of Israel about *thither*.”

a. “*Gath*”

1) The city of Gath was the chief city of the Philistine Pentapolis³, or the 5 cities of the Philistines.

a) Gaza, Ashkelon, Ashdod, Gath, and Ekron.

b. “*all the lords of the Philistines*”

1) These would be the 5 kings of the Philistine city-states.

[EKRON \(v. 10-12\)](#)

III. THE RETURN OF THE ARK. (6)

A. (v. 13)

1. “And *they of Bethshemesh were* reaping their wheat harvest in the valley: and they lifted up their eyes, and saw the ark, and rejoiced to see *it*.”

a. “*wheat harvest*” = Pentecost, which was May/June

³ A pentapolis is a geographic grouping of five cities.

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1) This means that the Ark was with the Philistines in the winter months, the previous 7 months (v. 1).

b. “*the valley*” = the Valley of Sorek

B. (v. 14)

1. “***...the field of Joshua, a Bethshemite...***”

a. d

C. (v. 15)

1. “***And the Levites took down the ark of the LORD, and the coffer that was with it, wherein the jewels of gold were, and put them on the great stone:...***”

a. “*the Levites*”

1) Bethshemesh was a Levitical city ([Joshua 21:16](#)).

2. “***...and the men of Bethshemesh offered burnt offerings and sacrificed sacrifices the same day unto the LORD.***”

a. They were allowed to offer sacrifices there because Shiloh had been destroyed, where the Tabernacle was, and now there is no central location for worship.

D. (v. 18)

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1. ***“And the golden mice, according to the number of all the cities of the Philistines belonging to the five lords, both of fenced cities, and of country villages, even unto the great stone of Abel, whereon they set down the ark of the LORD: which stone remaineth unto this day in the field of Joshua, the Bethshemite.”***

a. *“the great stone of Abel”*

- 1) This stone evidently marked the distinction between Israeli territory and Philistine territory.
- 2) This last December 2019, archeologists discovered a giant flat stone ritual table. This peculiar stone, supported by stone “legs,” was discovered inside a temple dating to around 1100 B.C. And it may be the very same stone mentioned in the biblical account of the ark of the covenant.⁴



b. *“unto this day in the field of Joshua, the Bethshemite”*

- 1)

⁴ <https://watchjerusalem.co.il/852-was-this-where-the-ark-of-the-covenant-sat>

<https://www.jpost.com/israel-news/ancient-stone-table-at-beit-shemesh-may-hold-link-to-ark-of-the-covenant-611444>

Both websites accessed 11/19/2020

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BETH-SHEMESH (v. 19-20)

E. (v. 19)

1. **“And he smote the men of Bethshemesh, because they had looked into the ark of the LORD, even he smote of the people fifty thousand and threescore and ten men: and the people lamented, because the LORD had smitten many of the people with a great slaughter.”**
 - a. “because they had looked into the ark of the LORD”
 - 1) The Ark was covered with 3 layers of linen (Numbers 4:5-6) so that people could not touch it, much less look into it, and the Law stated that they were to not touch the Ark to stay 1,000 yards away from the Ark (Numbers 4:5-6, 15, 18-20; Joshua 3:4).
 - b. “he smote of the people fifty thousand and threescore and ten men”
 - 1) The Masoretic Text here says “And He struck of the people seventy men fifty thousand men and lamented”, whereas the other three major Hebrew manuscripts only read “seventy”.
 - a) Fifty-thousand would be a very high number of people to even live in that area at that time.
 - b) The Hebrew grammar can mean that “of the fifty-thousand men, seventy were slain”.

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KIRIATH-JEARIM (v. 21)