
1SAMUEL 4: 1 The word of Samuel came to all Israel. Now Israel went out against the Philistines to battle, and encamped beside Ebenezer: and the Philistines encamped in Aphek.

A battle between Israel and the Philistines, in which the former are defeated, with the loss of four thousand men, 1Sam 4:1, 1Sam 4:2. They resolve to give the Philistines battle once more, and bring the ark of the Lord, with Hophni and Phinehas the priests, into the camp, 1Sam 4:3, 1Sam 4:4. They do so, and become vainly confident, 1Sam 4:5. At this the Philistines are dismayed, 1Sam 4:6-9. The battle commences; the Israelites are again defeated, with the loss of thirty thousand men; Hophni and Phinehas are among the slain; and the ark of the Lord is taken, 1Sam 4:10, 1Sam 4:11. A Benjamite runs with the news to Eli; who, hearing of the capture of the ark, falls from his seat, and breaks his neck, 1Sam 4:12-18. The wife of Phinehas, hearing of the death of her husband, and father-in-law, and of the capture of the ark, is taken in untimely travail, begets forth a son, calls him I-chabod, and expires, 1Sam 4:19-22.

Verse 1

The word of Samuel came to all Israel - This clause certainly belongs to the preceding chapter, and is so placed by the Vulgate, Septuagint, Syriac, and Arabic.

Pitched beside Eben-ezer - This name was not given to this place till more than twenty years after this battle, see 1Sam 7:12; for the monument called האבן העזר *haeben haezer*, the "Stone of Help," was erected by Samuel in the place which was afterwards from this circumstance, called Eben-ezer, when the Lord had given the Israelites a signal victory over the Philistines. It was situated in the tribe of Judah, between Mizpeh and Shen, and not far from the Aphek here mentioned. This is another proof that this book was compiled after the times and transactions which it records, and probably from memoranda which had been made by a contemporary writer.

1SAMUEL 4: 2 The Philistines put themselves in array against Israel: and when they joined battle, Israel was struck before the Philistines; and they killed of the army in the field about four thousand men.

Verse 2

Put themselves in array - There is no doubt that both the Philistines and Israelites had what might be called the art of war, according to which they marshalled their troops in the field, constructed their camps, and conducted their retreats, sieges, etc.; but we know not the principles on which they acted.

They slew of the army in the field about four thousand men - This must have been a severe conflict, as four thousand were left dead on the field of battle. The contest also must have lasted some considerable time, as these were all slain hand to hand; swords and spears being in all probability the only weapons then used.

1SAMUEL 4: 3 When the people had come into the camp, the elders of Israel said, "Why has the LORD struck us today before the Philistines? Let us get the ark of the covenant of the LORD out of Shiloh to us, that it may come among us, and save us out of the hand of our enemies."

Verse 3

Let us fetch the ark - They vainly supposed that the ark could save them, when the God of it had departed from them because of their wickedness. They knew that in former times their fathers had been beaten by their enemies, when they took not the ark with them to battle; as in the case of their wars with the Canaanites, Num 14:44, Num 14:45; and that they had conquered when they took this with them, as in the case of the destruction of Jericho, Jos 6:4. From the latter clause they took confidence; but the cause of their miscarriage in the former they laid not to heart. It was customary with all the nations of the earth to take their gods and sacred ensigns with them to war. The Persians, Indians, Greeks, Romans, Germans, Philistines, etc., did so. Consecrated crosses, blessing and hallowing of colors and standards, are the modern remains of those ancient superstitions.

1SAMUEL 4: 4 So the people sent to Shiloh; and they brought from there the ark of the covenant of the LORD of Armies, who sits above the cherubim: and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were there with the ark of the covenant of God.

Verse 4

The Lord of hosts - See on 1Sam 1:3 (note).

Dwelleth between the cherubims - Of what shape the cherubim were, we know not; but there was one of these representative figures placed at each end of the ark of the covenant; and between them, on the lid or cover of that ark, which was called the propitiatory or mercy-seat, the shechinah, or symbol of the Divine presence, was said to dwell. They thought, therefore, if they had the ark, they must necessarily have the presence and influence of Jehovah.

1SAMUEL 4: 5 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.

Verse 5

All Israel shouted - Had they humbled themselves, and prayed devoutly and fervently for success, they would have been heard and saved. Their shouting proved both their vanity and irreligion.

1SAMUEL 4: 6 When the Philistines heard the noise of the shout, they said, "What does the noise of this great shout in the camp of the Hebrews mean?" They understood that the LORD's ark had come into the camp.

1SAMUEL 4: 7 The Philistines were afraid, for they said, "God has come into the camp." They said, "Woe to us! For there has not been such a thing before."

Verse 7

God is come into the camp - They took for granted, as did the Israelites, that his presence was inseparable from his ark or shrine.

1SAMUEL 4: 8 Woe to us! Who shall deliver us out of the hand of these mighty gods? These are the gods that struck the Egyptians with all kinds of plagues in the wilderness.

Verse 8

These mighty Gods - מִיַּד הָאֱלֹהִים הַאֲדָרִים miyad haelohim haaddirim, from the hand of these illustrious Gods. Probably this should be translated in the singular, and not in the plural: Who shall deliver us from the hand of this illustrious God?

1SAMUEL 4: 9 Be strong, and behave like men, O you Philistines, that you not be servants to the Hebrews, as they have been to you. Strengthen yourselves like men, and fight!"

Verse 9

Be strong, etc. - This was the address to the whole army, and very forcible it was. "If ye do not fight, and acquit yourselves like men, ye will be servants to the Hebrews, as they have been to you; and you may expect that they will avenge themselves of you for all the cruelty you have exercised towards them."

1SAMUEL 4: 10 The Philistines fought, and Israel was struck, and they fled every man to his tent: and there was a very great slaughter; for there fell of Israel thirty thousand footmen.

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

Verse 11

Hophni and Phinehas were slain - They probably attempted to defend the ark, and lost their lives in the attempt.

1SAMUEL 4: 12 There ran a man of Benjamin out of the army, and came to Shiloh the same day, with his clothes torn, and with earth on his head.

Verse 12

Came to Shiloh the same day - The field of battle could not have been at any great distance, for this young man reached Shiloh the same evening after the defeat.

With his clothes rent, and with earth upon his head - These were signs of sorrow and distress among all nations. The clothes rent, signified the rending, dividing, and scattering, of the people; the earth, or ashes on the head, signified their humiliation: "We are brought down to the dust of the earth; we are near to our graves." When the Trojan fleet was burnt, Aeneas is represented as tearing his robe from his shoulder, and invoking the aid of his gods: -

Tum pius Aeneas humeris abscindere vestem,

Auxilioque vocare Deos, et tendere palmas.

Virg. Aen. lib. v., ver. 685. "The prince then tore his robes in deep despair,

Raised high his hands, and thus address'd his prayer."

Pitt.

We have a remarkable example in the same poet, where he represents the queen of King Latinus resolving on her own death, when she found that the Trojans had taken the city by storm: -

Purpueros moritura manu discindit amictus.

Aen. lib. xii., ver. 603.

She tears with both her hands her purple vest.

But the image is complete in King Latinus himself, when he heard of the death of his queen, and saw his city in flames: - - It scissa veste Latinus, Conjugis attonitus fati, urbisque ruina,

Canitiem immundo perfusam pulvere turpans.

Ib., ver. 609.

Latinus tears his garments as he goes.

Both for his public and his private woes:

With filth his venerable beard besmears,

And sordid dust deforms his silver hairs.

Dryden.

We find the same custom expressed in one line by Catullus: -

Canitiem terra, atque infuso pulvere foedans.

Epith. Pelei et Thetidos, ver. 224.

Dishonoring her hoary locks with earth and sprinkled dust.

The ancient Greeks in their mourning often shaved off their hair: - Τουτο νυ και γερας οιον οϊζυροισι βροτοιισι, Κειρασθαι τε κομην, βαλειειν τ' απο δακρυ παρειων.

Hom. Odyss. lib. iv., ver. 197. "Let each deplore his dead: the rites of wo

Are all, alas! the living can bestow
 O'er the congenial dust, enjoin'd to shear
 The graceful curl, and drop the tender tear."

Pope.

And again: - Κατθεμεν εν λεχεεσσι καθηραντες χροα καλον'Υδατι τε λιαρω και αλειφατι· πολλα δε σ' αμφις Δακρυα θερμα χεον Δαναοι, κειροντο τε χαιτας.

Ib., lib. xxiv., ver. 44. "Then unguents sweet, and tepid streams, we shed;

Tears flow'd from every eye; and o'er the dead

Each clipp'd the curling honors of his head."

Pope.

The whole is strongly expressed in the case of Achilles, when he heard of the death of his friend Patroclus: - Ώς φατο· τον δ' αχεος νεφεος νεφελη εκαλυψε μελαινα Αμφοτερησι δε χερσιν ελων κονιν αοθαλοεσσαν, Χευατο κακ κεφαλης, χαριεν δ' ησχυνε προσωπον· Ν ε κ τ α ρ ε ω δε χιτωνι μελαιν' αμφιζανε τεφρη.

Iliad, lib. xviii., ver. 22. "A sudden horror shot through all the chief,

And wrapp'd his senses in the cloud of grief.

Cast on the ground, with furious hands he spread

The scorching ashes o'er his graceful head:

His purple garments, and his golden hairs.

Those he deforms with dust, and these with tears."

Pope.

It is not unusual, even in Europe, and in the most civilized parts of it, to see grief expressed by tearing the hair, beating the breasts, and rending the garments; all these are natural signs, or expression of deep and excessive grief, and are common to all the nations of the world.

1SAMUEL 4: 13 When he came, behold, Eli was sitting on his seat by the road watching; for his heart trembled for the ark of God. When the man came into the city, and told it, all the city cried out.

Verse 13

His heart trembled for the ark of God - He was a most mild and affectionate father, and yet the safety of the ark lay nearer to his heart than the safety of his two sons. Who can help feeling for this aged, venerable man?

1SAMUEL 4: 14 When Eli heard the noise of the crying, he said, "What does the noise of this tumult mean?" The man hurried, and came and told Eli.

1SAMUEL 4: 15 Now Eli was ninety-eight years old; and his eyes were set, so that he could not see.

1SAMUEL 4: 16 The man said to Eli, "I am he who came out of the army, and I fled today out of the army." He said, "How did the matter go, my son?"

1SAMUEL 4: 17 He who brought the news answered, "Israel has fled before the Philistines, and there has been also a great slaughter among the people. Your two sons also, Hophni and Phinehas, are dead, and the ark of God has been captured."

Verse 17

And the messenger answered - Never was a more afflictive message, containing such a variety of woes, each rising above the preceding, delivered in so few words.

1. Israel is fled before the Philistines.

This was a sore evil: that Israel should turn their backs upon their enemies, was bad; and that they should turn their backs on such enemies as the

Philistines, was yet worse; for now they might expect the chains of their slavery to be strengthened and riveted more closely.

2. There hath also been a great slaughter among the people.

A rout might have taken place without any great previous slaughter; but in this case the field was warmly contested, thirty thousand were laid dead on the spot. This was a deeper cause of distress than the preceding; as if he had said, "The flower of our armies is destroyed; scarcely a veteran now to take the field."

3. Thy two sons also, Hophni and Phinehas, are dead.

This was still more afflictive to him as a father, to lose both his sons, the only hope of the family; and to have them taken away by a violent death when there was so little prospect of their having died in the peace of God, was more grievous than all.

4. The ark of God is taken.

This was the most dreadful of the whole; now Israel is dishonored in the sight of the heathen, and the name of the Lord will be blasphemed by them. Besides, the capture of the ark shows that God is departed from Israel; and now there is no farther hope of restoration for the people, but every prospect of the destruction of the nation, and the final ruin of all religion! How high does each wo rise on the back of the preceding! And with what apparent art is this very laconic message constructed! And yet, probably, no art at all was used, and the messenger delivered the tidings just as the facts rose up in his own mind.

How vapid, diffused, and alliterated, is the report of the messenger in the Persae of Aeschylus, who comes to the queen with the tremendous account of the destruction of the whole naval power of the Persians, at the battle of Salamis? I shall give his first speech, and leave the reader to compare the two accounts. Ω γης άπασης Ασιδος πολισματα, Ω Περσις αια, και πολυς πλουτου λιμην, Ως εν

μια πληγη κατεφθαρται πολυς Ολβος, το Περσων δ' ανθος οιχται πεσον. Ωμοι, κακον μεν πρωτον αγγελειν κακα· Περσαις, στρ α τ ο ς γαρ πας αλωλε βαρβαρων.

Of which I subjoin the following translation by Mr. Potter: -

Wo to the towns through Asia's peopled realms!

Wo to the land of Persia, once the port

Of boundless wealth! how is thy glorious state

Vanish'd at once, and all thy spreading honors

Fallen, lost! Ah me! unhappy is his task

That bears unhappy tidings; but constraint

Compels me to relate this tale of wo:

Persians! the whole barbaric host is fallen.

This is the sum of his account, which he afterwards details in about a dozen of speeches.

Heroes and conquerors, ancient and modern, have been celebrated for comprising a vast deal of information in a few words. I will give three examples, and have no doubt that the Benjamite in the text will be found to have greatly the advantage.

1. Julius Caesar having totally defeated Pharnaces, king of Pontus, wrote a letter to the Roman senate, which contained only these three words: -

Veni, Vidi, Vici;

I came, I saw, I conquered.

This war was begun and ended in one day.

2. Admiral Hawke having totally defeated the French fleet, in 1759, off the coast of Brittany, wrote as follows to King George II.: - "Sire, I have taken, burnt, and destroyed all the French fleet, as per margin. - Hawke."

3. Napoleon Buonaparte, then general-in-chief of the French armies in Italy, wrote to Josephine, his wife, the evening before he attacked Field Marshal Alvinzi, the imperial general: - "Demain j'attaquerai l'ennemie; je le battrai; et j'en finirai." "To-morrow I shall attack the enemy; I shall defeat them, and terminate the business."

He did so: the imperialists were totally defeated, Mantua surrendered, and the campaign for that year (1796) was concluded.

In the above examples, excellent as they are in their kind, we find little more than one idea, whereas the report of the Benjamite includes several; for, in the most forcible manner, he points out the general and particular disasters of the day, the rout of the army, the great slaughter, the death of the priests, who were in effect the whole generals of the army, and the capture of the ark; all that, on such an occasion, could affect and distress the heart of an Israelite. And all this he does in four simple assertions.

1SAMUEL 4: 18 When he made mention of the ark of God, Eli fell from off his seat backward by the side of the gate; and his neck broke, and he died; for he was an old man, and heavy. He had judged Israel forty years.

Verse 18

When he made mention of the ark of God - Eli bore all the relation till the messenger came to this solemn word; he had trembled before for the ark, and now, hearing that it was captured, he was transfixed with grief, fell down from his seat, and dislocated his neck! Behold the judgments of God! But shall we say that this man, however remiss in the education of his children, and criminal in his indulgence towards his profligate sons, which arose more from the easiness of his disposition than from a desire to encourage vice, is gone to perdition? God forbid! No man ever died with such benevolent and religious feelings, and yet perished.

He had judged Israel forty years - Instead of forty years, the Septuagint has here εικοσι ετη, twenty years. All the other versions, as well as the Hebrew text, have forty years.

1SAMUEL 4: 19 His daughter-in-law, Phinehas' wife, was with child, near to be delivered. When she heard the news that the ark of God was taken, and that her father-in-law and her husband were dead, she bowed herself and gave birth; for her pains came on her.

Verse 19

And his daughter-in-law - This is another very affecting story; the defeat of Israel, the capture of the ark, the death of her father-in-law, and the slaughter of her husband, were more than a woman in her circumstances, near the time of her delivery could bear. She bowed, travailed, was delivered of a son, gave the child a name indicative of the ruined state of Israel, and expired!

1SAMUEL 4: 20 About the time of her death the women who stood by her said to her, "Don't be afraid; for you have given birth to a son." But she didn't answer, neither did she regard it.

Verse 20

But she answered not - She paid no attention to what the women had said concerning her having borne a son; that information she regarded not.

1SAMUEL 4: 21 She named the child 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.

Verse 21

She named the child I-chabod - The versions are various on the original words כְּבוֹד I-chabod; the Septuagint, οὐαίβραχάβωθ ouaibrachaboth; the Syriac, yochobor; the Arabic, yochabad. But none of these give us much light on the subject. It is pretty evident they did not know well what signification to give the name; and we are left to collect its meaning from what she says afterwards, The glory is departed from Israel; the words literally mean, Where is the glory? And indeed where was it, when the armies of Israel were defeated by the Philistines, the priests slain, the supreme magistrate dead, and the ark of the Lord taken?

This is a very eventful, interesting, and affecting chapter, and prepares the reader for those signal manifestations of God's power and providence by which the ark was restored, the priesthood re-established, an immaculate judge given to Israel, the Philistine yoke broken, and the people of the Most High caused once more to triumph. God humbled them that he might exalt them; he suffered his glory for a time to become eclipsed, that he might afterwards cause it to break out with the greater effulgence.

1SAMUEL 4: 22 She said, "The glory has departed from Israel; for the ark of God is taken."
