

# CHAPTER 4

## INTRODUCTION TO FIRST SAMUEL 4

This chapter is a narrative of a war between Israel and the Philistines, in the time of Samuel, and of the consequences of it. In the first battle, the Philistines had the better of the Israelites, which caused the latter to inquire into the reason of it, and who proposed to fetch the ark of the Lord, and did, to repair their loss, and prepare for a second battle, in which they hoped to succeed, and which struck a panic into their enemies, (<sup><000E></sup>1 Samuel 4:1-7), who yet encouraged and stirred up one another to behave in a courageous manner, and victory a second time was on their side, a great number of the Israelites were slain, among whom were Hophni and Phinehas, the two sons of Eli, and the ark of God was taken, (<sup><000E></sup>1 Samuel 4:8-11), the news of which being brought to Eli, he fell back and died, (<sup><000E></sup>1 Samuel 4:12-18) and to his daughter-in-law, who upon it fell into labour, and died also, (<sup><000E></sup>1 Samuel 4:19-22).

**Ver. 1.** *And the word of Samuel came to all Israel*, etc.] Or was “known”, as the Targum, the word of prophecy by him, which related to what befell Eli and his family; this was spread throughout the land, and everyone almost had knowledge of it, and which began to be fulfilled in the war between Israel and the Philistines, later related; or the doctrine, instructions, and exhortations of Samuel to the people of Israel, were by the means of others conveyed throughout the land; and yet they went into measures which proved fatal and ruinous to them; or the word of Samuel, which was from the Lord, came to Israel, to stir them up to go to war with the Philistines, whereby the punishment threatened to Eli’s family would begin to have its accomplishment:

*now Israel went out against the Philistines to battle*; according to the word of Samuel, or of the Lord by him; though Ben Gersom thinks they did this of themselves, which was their sin, and did not ask counsel of the Lord, nor of Samuel his prophet; but it seems as if the Philistines were the aggressors, and first came forth to war against them, and they went out to meet them <sup>f78</sup>, as the word is, and defend themselves as it became them: this was forty years after the death of Samson, and at the end of Eli’s

government, who judged Israel so many years, when they had recruited themselves, and recovered their losses they sustained by Samson; and when they perceived a new judge was raised up among the Israelites, who was likely to be of great service to them, and to prevent their authority over them, and therefore thought to begin with them as soon as possible:

*and pitched beside Ebenezer*; a place so called by anticipation, and had its name from an later victory obtained, when Samuel set up a stone between Mizpeh and Shen, and called it by this name, (<sup><0172></sup>1 Samuel 7:12), it signifies a stone of help:

*and the Philistines pitched in Aphek*; a city in the tribe of Judah, bordering on the Philistines, (see Gill on "<sup><0128></sup>Joshua 12:18").

**Ver. 2.** *And the Philistines put themselves in array against Israel*, etc.] Prepared for battle, and put themselves in a posture for it; formed themselves in a line of battle, and so invited and challenged the Israelites to fight them:

*and when they joined battle*; engaged with each other, the Israelites doing the same, putting themselves in a proper form and posture for fighting; or "the battle was spread", or "spread itself"<sup>f79</sup>; that is, as the Targum, they that made war were spread; the soldiers were placed in order for battle, to the right and left, which took up on both sides a large space; though Abarbinel understands this in a very different sense, and takes the word to have the same signification as in (<sup><0780></sup>Psalm 78:60), where it has the sense of forsaking; and so here the Israelites forsook the battle, and fled, which brought on their destruction, flight being, as the Jews say<sup>f80</sup>, the beginning of fall or ruin, as it follows:

*Israel was smitten before the Philistines*; they had the worst of it and were beaten:

*and they slew of the army in the field about four thousand men*; so many fell upon the spot, in the field.

**Ver. 3.** *And when the people came into the camp*, etc.] At Ebenezer, where they pitched their tents, and from whence they went out to battle, and whither they returned after their defeat:

*the elders of Israel said, wherefore hath the Lord smitten us today before the Philistines?* they were right in ascribing it to the Lord, who had

suffered them to be defeated by their enemies, but it is strange they should be so insensible of the cause of it; there was a reason ready at hand, their sins and iniquities were the cause of it, the corruption of manners among them, their neglect of bringing their offerings to the Lord, and the idolatry that many of them were guilty of, at least secretly, (~~912~~ 1 Samuel 2:24 7:3) to punish them for which, they were brought into this war, and smitten in it; and yet they wonder at it, that so it should be, that they the people of God should be smitten before Heathens and uncircumcised Philistines; and the rather, since they went to battle with them according to the word of the Lord by Samuel; not considering that they went into this war without humiliation for their sins, and without praying to God for success, and that it was intended as a correction of them for their offences against God:

*let us fetch the ark of the covenant of the Lord out of Shiloh unto us;* in which the law was, sometimes called the covenant between God and them; and which was a symbol of the divine Presence, for want of which they supposed they had not the presence of God with them, and so had not success; and the rather they were encouraged to take this step and method, because that formerly Israel had success against their enemies when the ark was with them, (~~930~~ Numbers 31:6 ~~936~~ Joshua 6:6) though no doubt in this there was an overruling providence of God, by which they were led to take such a step as this, in order to bring the two sons of Eli into the camp, that they might be slain in one day, according to the divine prediction:

*that when it cometh among us, it may save us out of the hand of our enemies;* foolishly placing their confidence in an external symbol, and not in the Lord himself; ascribing salvation to that, which only belongs to him, whether of a temporal or spiritual kind: and such folly and vanity are men guilty of when they seek to, make use of, and trust in anything short of Christ for salvation; as in carnal descent; in the rituals of the law; in the ordinances of the Gospel; in any religious exercises, private or public; or in any works of righteousness done by them: in Christ alone is salvation from spiritual enemies; and indeed from the Lord only is salvation and deliverance from temporal enemies.

**Ver. 4.** *So the people sent to Shiloh,* etc.] They liked the proposal of the elders, took their advice, and joined with them in a message to Eli the high priest at Shiloh:

*that they might bring from thence the ark of the covenant of the Lord of hosts, which dwelleth between the cherubim;* which overshadowed the

mercy seat that was upon the ark, and was the residence of the divine Majesty; wherefore having this with them, they concluded they should have the presence of God with them, and so success, (see <sup>350</sup>Psalm 53:1 99:1)

*and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were there with the ark of the covenant of God;* these, either with or without the leave of Eli, took the ark out of the tabernacle, and carried it on their shoulders to the camp, or however attended it there, being borne by other priests or Levites; and by this means they were brought into the camp, and so to battle, to meet their doom there; according to Bunting <sup>f81</sup>, it was carried by them forty two miles.

**Ver. 5.** *And when the ark of the covenant of the Lord came into the camp,* etc.] Being brought thither by the men that carried it:

*all Israel shouted with a great shout,* so that the earth rang again; this they did as now sure of victory, because of the ark, and to give spirit and courage to each other to go forth to battle, and to strike a panic into their enemies.

**Ver. 6.** *And when the Philistines heard the noise of the shout,* etc.] For it being so loud as to make the earth ring, it was heard in the camp of the Philistines, which might not be at any great distance from the camp of Israel; how far from each other were Aphek and Ebenezer is not certain;

*they said, what meaneth the noise of this great shout in the camp of the Hebrews?* they could not conceive what should be the reason of it, seeing they had no occasion to shout for joy, having been lately defeated; and a shout is made generally just before a battle is begun, and the onset made, or when victory is obtained; neither of which was the case now:

*and they understood that the ark of the Lord was come into the camp:* this they understood by spies, which they sent to find out the meaning of the shout; which is more probable than that they came to the knowledge of it by deserters; seeing it is not very likely that any Israelites would desert to the Philistines.

**Ver. 7.** *And the Philistines were afraid,* etc.] When the spies returned, and reported to them the reason of the shouting:

*for they said, God is come into the camp;* into the camp of Israel, because the ark represented him, and was the symbol of his presence; and these

Heathens might take the ark itself for an idol of the Israelites; the Targum is,

“the ark of God is come”

*and they said, woe unto us*; it is all over with us, destruction and ruin will be our case, victory will go on their side now their God is among them:

*for there hath not been such a thing heretofore*; if by this they meant that the ark had never been in the camp of Israel before, they were mistaken; and it is no great wonder they should, being not so well acquainted with the affairs of Israel, and their customs; or rather, it was not so yesterday, or three days ago, when they were defeated; there was no shouting then: or the state of the war is altered; before we fought with the men of Israel, but now we must fight with the God of Israel also.

**Ver. 8.** *Woe unto us, who shall deliver us out of the hand of these mighty gods?* etc.] Of whom they spoke in an ironical and sneering manner; or if seriously and through fear, they use their own Heathenish language, as if the Israelites had many gods, as they had, though mightier than theirs; though the Syriac and Arabic versions read in the singular, out of the hand of God, or the most strong God; and so the Targum, out of the hand of the Word of the Lord:

*these are the gods that smote the Egyptians with all the plagues in the wilderness*: the ten plagues were inflicted on the Egyptians in the land of Egypt, and not in the wilderness; wherefore the Philistines may be supposed to be mistaken in this circumstance; which is not to be wondered at, since many historians who have written of the affairs of the Jews have been mistaken in them, as Justin, Tacitus, and others; nay, even Josephus himself in some things: but perhaps respect is had to the drowning of Pharaoh and his host in the Red sea, which had the wilderness of Etham on both sides of it; and this stroke was the finishing one of the plagues on the Egyptians. R. Joseph Kimchi supposes the word for wilderness has the signification of speech, as in (<sup>214B</sup> Song of Solomon 4:3) and that the sense of the Philistines is, that God smote the Egyptians with all the plagues he did by his word, his orders, and commands; but now he was come in person, and would smite them by himself; this sense Abarbinel calls a beautiful one.

**Ver. 9.** *Be strong, and quit yourselves like men, O ye Philistines,* etc.] Since this was all they had to depend upon, their manly courage; if they did

not exert that it was all over with them; and seeing their case was desperate, having gods as well as men to fight with, it became them to exert themselves to the uttermost; which did they, there was a possibility still of gaining victory, and so immortal honour to themselves; these words seem to be spoken by the generals and officers of the army of the Philistines to the common soldiers:

*that ye be not servants to the Hebrews, as they have been to you*; that is, before and in the times of Samson; but it appears from hence that at this time neither the Philistines ruled over the Israelites, nor the Israelites over them; but as there was danger of their becoming subject to Israel, they had better die gloriously in the field of battle than to be in the base state of servitude:

*quit yourselves like men, and fight*; this is repeated to animate them to battle, which they supposed was not far off by the shoutings of the Israelites, and which they must prepare for.

**Ver. 10.** *And the Philistines fought*, etc.] With great ardour and spirit, quitted themselves like men of valour and courage, their case being desperate as they imagined, since God was in the camp of Israel:

*and Israel was smitten*: were routed and beaten:

*and they fled every man into his tent*; such of them as escaped the sword of the Philistines fled to their own houses in the several cities from whence they came; so the Targum,

“every man to his city”

so that their army was quite broken up:

*and there was a very great slaughter* far greater than in the first battle:

*For there fell of Israel thirty thousand footmen*; their army chiefly, if not altogether, consisting of footmen, there being few horses in Israel; and if any cavalry now, these may be supposed to flee; before they lost only 4000, now 30,000; so that the ark was no security to them, which was suffered, to show their vain trust and confidence in it.

**Ver. 11.** *And the ark of God was taken*, etc.] By the Philistines; which was suffered partly as a punishment to the Israelites, for fetching it from the tabernacle without the will of God, and for their vain confidence in it; and

partly that the Philistines might have an experiment of the power and might of God, as Procopius Gazaeus observes, by what they would suffer through having it among them; some have thought that this was an emblem of Christ being delivered into the hands of the Gentiles, and of the Gospel being translated from the Jews to them: and the two sons of Eli,

*Hophni and Phinehas*, were slain; which fulfilled the prophecy of the man of God, that they should both die in one day, (<sup>0023</sup>1 Samuel 2:34). It is very probable they stood fast by the ark, and chose rather to die than to give it up freely; having received a charge from their father, that if the ark was taken, not to desire life, nor ever dare to come into his presence more, as Josephus<sup>f82</sup> relates.

**Ver. 12.** *And there ran a man of Benjamin out of the army*, etc.] Out of the rank in which he was, before the whole army was quite broken up. This was a young man as Josephus<sup>f83</sup> says, which is highly probable; though not at all to be depended on is what the Jews<sup>f84</sup> say, that this was Saul, later king of Israel:

*and came to Shiloh the same day*; which, according to Bunting<sup>f85</sup>, was forty two miles from Ebenezer, near to which the battle was fought; and that it was a long way is pretty plain by the remark made, that this messenger came the same day the battle was fought; though not at such a distance as some Jewish writers say, some sixty, some one hundred and twenty miles<sup>f86</sup>; which is not at all probable:

*with his clothes rent, and earth upon his head*; which were both tokens of distress and mourning, and showed that he was a messenger of bad tidings from the army; (see Gill on “<sup>0006</sup>Joshua 7:6”).

**Ver. 13.** *And when he came*, etc.] To Shiloh; he either passed by Eli, who being blind could not see him, (<sup>0045</sup>1 Samuel 4:15) or he came in at another gate of the city on the other side of it, as Abarbinel thinks; though the former seems more likely by what follows, he not choosing to deliver the bad news to Eli first, whom he knew it would very much grieve, and therefore slipped by him into the city:

*lo, Eli sat upon a seat by the wayside watching*: by the “hand” of the way, as the marginal reading, and which we follow; it seems to be a place where two ways or more met, and where was a way post erected, with an hand directing what places they led to. The text is, “he”, or “it smote”, as if his heart smote him for letting the ark go; so Kimchi<sup>f87</sup>; here Eli had a seat

placed, which, as the Targum says, was at the ascent of the way to the gate; and so the Septuagint has it, at the gate; and Josephus<sup>f88</sup> says it was at one of the gates; either of his own house, or of the tabernacle, or rather of the city; here he was watching for news, to hear what he could, and as soon as he could, how it fared with the army, with his sons, and especially with the ark;

*for his heart trembled for the ark of God;* not so much for his sons, whose death he might expect from the divine prediction, but for the ark, about which he was doubtful; fearing lest it should fall into the hands of the uncircumcised Philistines, who would triumph upon it, and which would make sad the heart of every true Israelite, and reflect much dishonour on the God of Israel; and very probably he might tremble the more when he reflected on his own sin and folly in suffering his sons to take it with them. Eli here may represent a good man in pain for the church of God, and the interest of religion in declining times, both with respect to ministers of the word, and members of churches: as when Gospel ministers are removed by death, few raised up in their stead, and those that do appear in the ministry, either unregenerate, as it may be feared; or have not gifts and abilities qualifying them for it; or are of immoral lives and conversations, or propagate false doctrines, errors, and heresies: and also when among professors of religion and members of churches there is a great decay of powerful godliness; and they are got into a drowsy, sleepy, frame of spirit, are become lukewarm and indifferent to spiritual exercises, want zeal for the Gospel and cause of Christ; are careless about the honour and interest of religion, unstable and inconstant in doctrine and worship, and in their affections to one another, and the ministers of the word; and their conversation not as becomes their profession:

*and when the man came into the city, and told it;* how that the army of Israel was beaten, what a number of men was killed, among whom were the two sons of the high priest, and the ark was taken:

*all the city cried out;* that is, all the inhabitants of the city, having most of them perhaps relations and friends in the army, for whom they were concerned, fearing their lives were lost; but especially the loss of the ark was insupportable by them, it being of so much advantage to that city particularly, both with respect to things temporal and spiritual; wherefore, upon hearing this bad news, there was a general shriek and cry throughout the whole city.



**Ver. 14.** *And when Eli heard the noise of the crying,* etc.] The shrieks of the men and women, which were very clamorous and terrible. Eli had his hearing, though not his sight; he could not see the distress in their countenances, but he heard the lamentations they made:

*and said, what meaneth the noise of this tumult?* it seems the people ran about, wringing their hands, and making doleful shrieks; the noise of which Eli heard, and the meaning of which he inquired after, or what should be the cause of it:

*and the man came in hastily, and told Eli;* or made haste, and came to him, and related all that is later expressed; for Eli was not in any house, but on a seat by the way side, and therefore could not be said to come “in” to him; but he came to him, where he was, being brought by some of the citizens Eli had inquired of what should be the meaning of this noise; and therefore without delay the man was hastened to give the whole account unto him, as it was highly proper he should, being the supreme magistrate.

**Ver. 15.** *Now Eli was ninety eight years old,* etc.] Which is very properly observed, he being now come to the end of his days, and which also accounts for his blindness after mentioned:

*and his eyes were dim, that he could not see;* could not see the messenger, and read in his countenance, and perceive by his clothes rent, and earth on his head, that he was a bringer of bad tidings; or his eyes each of them “stood”<sup>f89</sup>; were fixed and immovable, as the eyes of blind men be. In (~~ORP~~1 Samuel 3:2) it is said, “his eyes began to wax dim”; but here that they “were” become dim; and there might be some years between that time and this, for Samuel then was very young, but now more grown up: though Procopius Gazaeus thinks that Eli was then ninety eight years of age, and that the affair there related was just before his death; but it rather appears to be some time before.

**Ver. 16.** *And the man said unto Eli, I am he that came out of the army,* etc.] It is very probable that the people Eli inquired of told him there was a messenger come from the army, though they did not choose to relate to him the news he brought:

*and I fled today out of the army;* so that as he was an eyewitness of what was done in the army, the account he brought was the earliest that could be had, in bringing which he had made great dispatch, having ran perhaps all the way:

*and he said, what is there done, my son?* has a battle been fought? on which side is the victory? is Israel beaten, or have they conquered? how do things go? he uses the kind and tender appellation, my son, to engage him to tell him all freely and openly.

**Ver. 17.** *And the messenger answered and said,* etc.] He delivered his account gradually, beginning with generals, and then proceeding to particulars, and with what he thought Eli could better bear the news of, and so prepared him for the worst; in which he acted a wise part:

*Israel is fled before the Philistines;* they have given way and retreated, and which might possibly be done without great loss, and which, though it was bad news, might not be so very bad:

*and there hath also been a great slaughter among the people;* this is worse news still; however, the number of the slain is not given, nor any mention of particular persons that were killed: so that, for any thing yet said, his own sons might be safe: but then it follows,

*and thy two sons also, Hophni and Phinehas, are dead;* the news of which must be very affecting to him, and strike him closely; though he might expect and be prepared for it by what both the man of God and Samuel from the Lord had related to him:

*and the ark of God is taken;* the thing he feared, and his heart trembled before for it; this was the closing and cutting part of the account; the messenger foresaw that this would the most affect him, and therefore referred it to the last.

**Ver. 18.** *And it came to pass, when he made mention of the ark of God,* etc.] Of the taking of that, it struck him to the heart, and killed him; the rest he bore tolerably well, the flight of Israel before the Philistines, the great slaughter made of them, the death of his two sons; but the taking of the ark was so dreadful to him, that he could not support under it:

*that he fell from off the seat backward, by the side of the gate;* which confirms the sense of (<sup>49013</sup>1 Samuel 4:13) though whether it was the gate of his own house, or of the tabernacle, or of the city is not certain; the latter is most probable: it seems the seat on which he sat had no back to it, and might be placed only for present convenience:

*and his neck brake*; the back part of it, the “vertebrae” of it, which has its name in Hebrew from the several joints in it:

*and he died*; not through the breaking of his neck, for it is very probable he died directly upon hearing the ark was taken, and which was the reason of his falling backward, and that brake his neck:

*for he was an old man, and heavy*; full of flesh, a very fat man, and so fell heavy, which occasioned the breaking of his neck:

*and he had judged Israel forty years*; had governed them in the capacity both of an high priest and judge, so that he must enter on his government when fifty eight years of age; the Septuagint version has it very wrongly twenty years. According to the Jews<sup>f90</sup>, he died on the tenth of Ijar, answering to part of April and May, and his two sons and the ark taken; for which a fast was kept on it.

**Ver. 19.** *And his daughter in law, Phinehas’s wife, was with child, near to be delivered*, etc.] Was near her time, as it is commonly expressed. Ben Gersom derives the word from a root which signifies to complete and finish<sup>f91</sup>; denoting that her time to bring forth was completed and filled up; though Josephus<sup>f92</sup> says that it was a seven months’ birth, so that she came two months before her time; the margin of our Bibles is, “to cry out”<sup>f93</sup>; and so Moses Kimchi, as his brother relates, derives the word from a root which signifies to howl and lament, and so is expressive of a woman’s crying out when her pains come upon her:

*and when she heard the tidings that the ark of God was taken*: which is mentioned first, as being the most distressing to her:

*and that her father in law and her husband were dead*; her father-in-law Eli is put first, being the high priest of God, and so his death gave her the greatest concern, as the death of an high priest was always matter of grief to the Israelites; and next the death of her husband, who should have succeeded him in the priesthood; for though he was a bad man, yet not so bad as Hophni, as Ben Gersom observes; and therefore the priesthood was continued in his line unto the reign of Solomon; and no notice is taken by her of the death of her brother-in-law:

*she bowed herself, and travailed*; put herself in a posture for travailing; perceiving she was coming to it, she fell upon her knees, as the word used signifies; and we are told<sup>f94</sup>, that the Ethiopian women, when they bring

forth, fall upon their knees, and bear their young, rarely making use of a midwife, and so it seems it was the way of the Hebrew women:

*for her pains came upon her*; sooner it is very probable than otherwise they would, which is sometimes the case, when frights seize a person in such circumstances: or were “turned upon her”<sup>f95</sup>; they ceased, so that she could not make the necessary evacuations after the birth, which issued in her death; some render it, “her doors were turned”<sup>f96</sup>, or changed; the doors of her womb, as in (~~880~~ Job 3:10), though these had been opened for the bringing forth of her child, yet were reversed, changed, and altered, so as to prevent the after birth coming away, which caused her death, as follows.

**Ver. 20.** *And about the time of her death*, etc.] Which quickly came on after she was brought to bed:

*the women that stood by her*; who were called to her labour, and assisted at it:

*said unto her, fear not, for thou hast born a son*; perceiving that she was very low spirited, endeavoured to cheer and comfort her, by observing to her that the worst was over; and besides she had brought forth a man child, which was usually matter of joy to a family, and particularly to the woman that bears it, which causes her to forget the sorrows and pains she has gone through in bearing it, (~~862~~ John 16:21) but she answered not, neither did she regard it; said not one word in answer to them, nor was the least affected with joy and pleasure at what they related to her; being not only a dying woman, on the borders of another world, and so had no relish for temporal enjoyments, but also overcome with grief with what had happened, not only to her family, but more especially to the ark of God.

**Ver. 21.** *And she named the child Ichabod*, etc.] Which some render, “where is the glory?” as in the margin of our Bibles; but it signifies “no glory”, as Jarchi and Kimchi interpret it; her husband being dead, she gives her child its name; the reason for which name follows:

*saying, the glory is departed from Israel*: the God of glory, or the glorious Lord, was departed from Israel; the ark, the symbol of his presence, being taken from them, and carried captive by the enemy; (see ~~878~~ Psalm 78:61)

*because the ark of God was taken, and because of her father in law, and her husband*; who were dead; these are the words either of the writer of

this book, or, as Abarbinel thinks, of the women that assisted at her labour; who interpreted the name of the child, and suggested what were her intentions in giving this name, which she had only expressed in general terms; the particulars of which they thought fit to give, agreeably to her meaning, as they supposed; which were the taking of the ark, and the death of her father-in-law, and of her husband; but according to the same writer she before her death corrected the sense they put upon her intention in thus naming the child; showing that it was not on the account of the death of her father and husband that she supposed the glory to be departed, and therefore named her child Ichabod: but solely and alone because the ark was taken, as in the next verse.

**Ver. 22.** *And she said*, etc.] Repeating what she had said before, for the confirmation of it, or as correcting what the women had said; and so may be rendered,

*but she said*; giving her own and only reason for the name of the child:

*the glory is departed from Israel, for the ark of God is taken*; so when the word, worship, and ordinances of God are removed from a people, the glory is gone from them; the God of glory is no more seen among them, who is so glorious in his nature, perfections, and works; and Christ, the Lord of life and glory, is no more held forth unto them in the glories of his person, offices, and grace; and the glorious Gospel of Christ is no more preached unto them, so full of glorious doctrines and promises; and the glorious ordinances of it no more administered: and, when this is the case, the glory is departed from a people; and which is owing to their formality, lukewarmness, unfruitfulness, negligent attendance on the worship of God, contempt of the word and ordinances, and an unbecoming walk and conversation.