

1 Samuel 4 – The Ark Is Captured

February 13, 2022

1. Background

...Now Israel went out to battle against the Philistines. They encamped at Ebenezer, and the Philistines encamped at Aphek. 1 Samuel 4:1 (ESV)

2. The First Defeat

The Philistines drew up in line against Israel, and when the battle spread, Israel was defeated before the Philistines, who killed about four thousand men on the field of battle. 1 Samuel 4:2 (ESV)

And when the people came to the camp, the elders of Israel said, “Why has the LORD defeated us today before the Philistines? Let us bring the ark of the covenant of the LORD here from Shiloh, that it may come among us and save us from the power of our enemies.” 1 Samuel 4:3 (ESV)

- The Israelites treated the ark like a lucky rabbit’s foot.

What things did the elders fail to consider?

1. Every time Israel suffered defeat in the past, it was because of sin among God’s people, not the superiority of an enemy.
2. The elders knew the corrupt behavior of Eli’s sons.
3. The elders knew God had promised to punish the house of Eli.

- **When we sin, we will suffer.**

For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives. Hebrews 12:6 (ESV)

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 1 John 1:9 (ESV)

Let us bring the ark of the covenant of the Lord here from Shiloh, that IT may come among us and save us...

3. The Second Defeat

So the people sent to Shiloh and brought from there the ark of the covenant of the LORD of hosts, who is enthroned on the cherubim. And the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were there with the ark of the covenant of God. 1 Samuel 4:4 (ESV)

...For the pillars of the earth are the Lord's, and on them he has set the world.
1 Samuel 2:8 (ESV)

- **God can not be manipulated or controlled by us.**

As soon as the ark of the covenant of the LORD came into the camp, all Israel gave a mighty shout, so that the earth resounded. 1 Samuel 4:5 (ESV)

And when the Philistines heard the noise of the shouting, they said, "What does this great shouting in the camp of the Hebrews mean?" And when they learned that the ark of the LORD had come to the camp, the Philistines were afraid, for they said, "A god has come into the camp." And they said, "Woe to us! For nothing like this has happened before. Woe to us! Who can deliver us from the power of these mighty gods? These are the gods who struck the Egyptians with every sort of plague in the wilderness. Take courage, and be men, O Philistines, lest you become slaves to the Hebrews as they have been to you; be men and fight." 1 Samuel 4:6–9 (ESV)

So the Philistines fought, and Israel was defeated, and they fled, every man to his home. And there was a very great slaughter, for thirty thousand foot soldiers of Israel fell. 1 Samuel 4:10 (ESV)

He forsook his dwelling at Shiloh, the tent where he dwelt among mankind, and delivered his power to captivity, his glory to the hand of the foe. He gave his people over to the sword and vented his wrath on his heritage. Psalm 78:60–62 (ESV)

And the ark of God was captured,... 1 Samuel 4:11a (ESV)

...and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, died. 1 Samuel 4:11 (ESV)

- **When we sin, other people suffer.**

4. Eli died at Shiloh.

A man of Benjamin ran from the battle line and came to Shiloh the same day, with his clothes torn and with dirt on his head. 1 Samuel 4:12 (ESV)

When he arrived, Eli was sitting on his seat by the road watching, for his heart trembled for the ark of God. And when the man came into the city and told the news, all the city cried out. 1 Samuel 4:13 (ESV)

When Eli heard the sound of the outcry, he said, "What is this uproar?" Then the man hurried and came and told Eli. Now Eli was ninety-eight years old and his eyes were set so that he could not see. 1 Samuel 4:14–15 (ESV)

And the man said to Eli, "I am he who has come from the battle; I fled from the battle today." And he said, "How did it go, my son?" He who brought the news answered and said, "Israel has fled before the Philistines, and there has also been a great defeat among the people. Your two sons also, Hophni and Phinehas, are dead, and the ark of God has been captured." As soon as he mentioned the ark of God, Eli fell over backward from his seat by the side of the gate, and his neck was broken and he died, for the man was old and heavy. He had judged Israel forty years.

1 Samuel 4:16–18 (ESV)

• The way to ruin our life and legacy is one small step at a time.

Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. Galatians 6:7–8 (ESV)

Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life. Proverbs 4:23 (ESV)

5. The Birth Of Ichabod

Now his daughter-in-law, the wife of Phinehas, was pregnant, about to give birth. And when she heard the news that the ark of God was captured, and that her father-in-law and her husband were dead, she bowed and gave birth, for her pains came upon her. And about the time of her death the women attending her said to her, "Do not be afraid, for you have borne a son." But she did not answer or pay attention.

1 Samuel 4:19–20 (ESV)

And she named the child Ichabod, saying, "The glory has departed from Israel!" because the ark of God had been captured and because of her father-in-law and her

husband. And she said, "The glory has departed from Israel, for the ark of God has been captured." 1 Samuel 4:21–22 (ESV)

• **When we sin, we lose peace and joy in our relationship with God.**

Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit. Psalm 51:9–12 (ESV)

Applications

1. Sin always brings suffering. When we sin, we suffer, other people suffer, and our relationship with God suffers.
2. The way to ruin our life and legacy is one small step at a time.
3. God can not be manipulated for our purposes.
4. God loves us. He offers to replace our Ichabod with Immanuel.

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 1 John 1:9 (ESV)

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. John 1:14 (ESV)

Life Group Questions

1. What did you learn in this week's lesson that you did not know? What questions do you have?
2. What would happen if we found the ark today? Would it have any supernatural power? How did Jesus change the glory of the ark? **See Hebrews 1:3.**
3. Is there a sense in which the glory of God can depart from a place today? **See Revelations 2 and 3.**
4. What are some of the ways people, either intentionally or unintentionally, try to manipulate God for their own purposes? Why does that not work?
5. One clear theme in this chapter is that sin always leads to suffering. When we sin, what are different ways suffering is experienced? **For helps see Hebrews 12:6; Joshua 7:3-5, 19-21, 25-26; 1 Peter 3:7**
6. The disastrous end of Eli's life is an example of little choices making a big difference. What do these verses teach us about making God-honoring choices in the little areas of life? **Read Galatians 6:7-8, Proverbs 13:21, 4:23, Philippians 4:8-9, 2 Corinthians 10:5?**
7. How does this chapter point us to the hope we have in Jesus?