

## 1 Samuel (Sh'mu'el Alef)

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### Chapter 4

**1 And Samuel spoke unto all Israel.<sup>1</sup> Now at that time Israel went out to meet the Philistines (P'lishtim)<sup>2</sup> in battle and pitched their camp beside Ebenezer (Even 'Ezer);<sup>3</sup> and the Philistines pitched theirs in Aphek (Afek).**

**2 And the Philistines put themselves in array against Israel; and when they joined battle, Israel was smitten before the Philistines, who slew of the army in the field about four thousand men.<sup>4</sup>**

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<sup>1</sup> Samuel, in spite of his youth, is recognized by the people as the Judge that God had raised up to lead Israel, though this is probably disputed by Eli's sons, for it is they who led the people into battle, rather than Samuel. He is probably Eli's right hand man. He needed Samuel to be his eyes, and he could trust Samuel to tell him the truth. His hair is worn in long braids, like Samson, but his strength is in his wisdom, rather than in his body. The people saw where Samson's lack of wisdom led him, so they are ready to value Samuel's wisdom.

It is interesting how much Samson and Samuel both parallel and contrast with each other. Samson, also, was born of a beautiful woman, much loved by her husband, and she was barren for many years. Both children were dedicated to the Lord and were Nazarites from infancy. Samuel had Samson before him as a cautionary tale to warn him against looking at pagan women in a lustful way, and the judgment on Eli's sons warned him against adultery with Israeli women. He did not allow himself to give rein to the normal urges of a teenaged boy. He applied himself to his calling from God, and Israel respected him for it. He was a fine example of godliness.

<sup>2</sup> The Philistines were presumptuous interlopers, who had come from Crete, forming colonies in Canaan, though God had given the land to Israel. Ironically, modern day interlopers have adopted the same name as the ancient trespassers.

<sup>3</sup> **H72**

אבן העזר

'eben ha<sup>ˆ</sup>' e<sup>ˆ</sup>zer

eh'-ben haw-e'-zer

From H68 and H5828 with the article inserted; **stone of the help**; Eben ha-Ezer, a place in Israel: - Ebenezer.

This was a place where Israel was going to experience defeat, but it actually was going to turn out to be help. Israel was going to be rid of two rotten priests, and of one whose compromising had saddled Israel with them. The Ark of the Covenant would be stolen, but God was going to restore His dignity and honour, even among the heathen, through the incident.

<sup>4</sup> God redeems all tragedies for those who trust Him. Two types of Israelites died that day. On the one hand, there were those who trusted Him as their Redeemer. They were released from this vale of tears that day, to live forever in Paradise where there is only joy. To them, their death is not a defeat, but a release to a better place.

The deaths of those who were not ready to meet their Maker were tragic. We should always be ready; it's insane to not be at peace with God, in the way that He has ordered that peace – through the Messiah, because He says that there is only one way. Perhaps some of these thought they were ready, as they considered themselves to be righteous men, but it is by faith we are saved, not by works. This was as true for Old Testament saints as it is for

**3 And when the people returned into the camp, the elders of Israel said, Why has the LORD (ADONAI) smitten us today before the Philistines? Let us bring the ark of the covenant of the LORD out of Shiloh unto us that when it comes among us, it<sup>5</sup> may save us out of the hand of our enemies.**

**4 So the people sent to Shiloh, and they brought from there the ark of the covenant of the LORD of the hosts, who dwells between the cherubim; and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas,<sup>6</sup> were there with the ark of the covenant of God.**

**5 And when the ark of the covenant of the LORD came into the camp, all Israel shouted with such a great shout that the earth trembled.<sup>7</sup>**

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those in the New Covenant. Their religious rituals availed them nothing, if they thought that they attained righteousness through their performance of them. The rituals were instituted to direct faith towards the Messiah.

Israel lost the battle that day. We sorrow over a battle that is lost, but that can help us to learn from our mistakes, and our losses can give us greater determination to not let it happen again. These people, however, did not learn right away from their mistakes.

<sup>5</sup> The elders did not consult the Lord about this plan. It just seemed like a good idea to them. This is the only time that the Ark of the Covenant was brought to a battle. Moses and Joshua did not do this. It wasn't because they were afraid to put the Ark at risk of being stolen, but rather because they prepared their hearts before the Ark to go out to battle. The Presence of God went with them through their faith.

The elders moved out of superstition. The heathen took their images to the battle, so they decided to imitate the heathen.

They didn't have the relationship; just religion. That's all that they'd had for a long time. They had tolerated Eli's sons because they wore the robes and did the ceremonies. If all Israel had risen up and camped at the door of the Tabernacle, and roared to Eli, "We're not moving from here until you kick your sons out of the priesthood," instead of just complaining about it, Eli would have had to do it. But these people had contented themselves with appearances for so long that they thought that having the physical representation of the Presence of God would give them an advantage in the battle. Religion doesn't give anyone an advantage in the spiritual realm.

No one dared to take the Ark of the Covenant with them into battle after this. God showed them that it would be futile to do it, unless He specifically told them to do it. Apparently, He never did that.

<sup>6</sup> Whatever it was that they hoped for the Ark of the Covenant to do for them, it seems that it was negated by having those two evil men, Hophni and Phinehas, in charge of it. There is no spiritual benefit when evil men are in charge of spiritual matters.

The whole situation seems to reflect the mistake of making our own plans, and then asking God to bless them, instead of going to God for His plan, which will be blessed. Our plans may have some religious tinsel on them, but God weighs the motives and the methods.

<sup>7</sup> It all sounded very triumphant, very godly, but Israel was doing the wrong thing. They had the wrong leaders; Hophni and Phinehas were evil men who were past saving. They were performing their priestly duties for show, to gain wealth and power.

The situation puts me in mind of a video I saw of a Christian praise and worship group, which featured a fabulous light show and a lot of cheering on the part of the audience, while they missed the occult symbolism that had been incorporated into the display. I don't know what the motives are of the performers, whether they are infiltrators,

**6 And when the Philistines heard the noise of the shout, they said, What great shout of joy is this in the camp of the Hebrews?<sup>8</sup> And they understood that the ark of the LORD had come into the camp.<sup>9</sup>**

**7 And the Philistines were afraid, for they said, God has come into the camp.<sup>10</sup> And they said, Woe unto us! For yesterday and day before yesterday it was not so.<sup>11</sup>**

**8 Woe unto us!<sup>12</sup> Who shall deliver us out of the hand of these mighty gods?<sup>13</sup> These are the gods that smote the Egyptians with all the plagues in the wilderness.<sup>14</sup>**

**9 Be strong and quit yourselves like men, O ye Philistines, that ye not serve the Hebrews as they have served you;<sup>15</sup> quit yourselves like men and fight.**

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or going along with this due to threats or bribes, or just plain ignorance, but the razzle dazzle of their worship will not render the godly results that are being sought.

<sup>8</sup> The Israelites made a lot of noise, and it attracted attention, but they weren't ready for the response that it was going to illicit. This is similar to how sometimes Christians boast of their strength, and this alarms people who are antichrist, spurring them to fight even harder than before against Christian influence and activities. We need to MAKE SURE that we're doing what God wants us to do, when He wants us to do it, and be ready for the reaction.

<sup>9</sup> The Philistines were idolaters, but they knew some things about what the Israelites believed and practiced, and what sort of artefacts they had that pertained to their religion. They didn't totally understand it, but they knew that the Ark of the Covenant was a rallying point, and they believed that it had power. It does, but not the way they supposed.

The Indiana Jones movie about the Ark of the Covenant gives a pretty good idea of what powers unbelievers think that Biblical artefacts possess. They believe that the spear that pierced Yehoshua's side, the spear of Longinus, has great power and that whoever possesses it will rule the world. I suppose it represents to satanists a triumph over God, because their values are perverse and their ideas about spiritual strength are upside down. The Philistines considered the Ark to possess a strong magic.

<sup>10</sup> God is everywhere. The Philistines were thinking of Him in the same sense of their own gods; possessing territory and having power only over that territory, though in struggles with other gods, He could take over their territory, as well.

<sup>11</sup> The Philistines thought that they had won the previous battle because Israel had not honoured their god enough. The Philistines probably sacrificed people on their altars to seek victory in battle; the Israelites didn't do things like that, so they probably considered it a weakness of theirs. But now they had brought a significant artefact to the field, and it was possibly going to turn the tide for them, if they did not take it seriously enough.

<sup>12</sup> The Philistines were an evil people who did plenty of cruel and disgusting things, that they enjoyed doing, and they didn't want to be killed, which is only natural, but they didn't have to be there, fighting Israel. If they were smart, they would have seen that Israel's conquest of Canaan was inevitable because God was on Israel's side, and in order to survive, they needed to leave Canaan to seek another homeland.

<sup>13</sup> The use of a plural indicates that they thought of God in the same manner as they did of their gods, as being a deity who had power over a territory, rather than the God of the whole Earth.

<sup>14</sup> Nonetheless, the God of Israel had made quite an impression. Hundreds of years later, the heathen remembered how the Israelites had been delivered from Egypt.

**10 And the Philistines fought, and Israel was smitten, and they fled each one into his tent, and there was a very great slaughter, for thirty thousand footmen of Israel fell.<sup>16</sup>**

**11 And the ark of God was taken,<sup>17</sup> and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were slain.<sup>18</sup>**

**12 And running out of the battle, a man of Benjamin came to Shiloh that same day with his clothes rent and with earth upon his head.**

**13 And when he came, behold Eli sat upon a seat by the wayside watching, for his heart trembled for the ark of God.<sup>19</sup> And when the man came into the city and gave the news, all the city cried out.<sup>20</sup>**

**14 And when Eli heard the noise of the crying, he said, What is the noise of this tumult?<sup>21</sup> And the man came in hastily and told Eli.<sup>22</sup>**

**15 Now Eli was ninety-eight years old,<sup>23</sup> and his eyes had become dim so that he could not see.**

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<sup>15</sup> The Philistines had ruled with tyranny; they certainly did not want to be made slaves and have all the atrocities that they had perpetrated coming down on them. The memory of their crimes made them fight all the harder, to escape prosecution.

<sup>16</sup> Wow! Bringing the Ark of the Covenant into the camp without consulting the Lord sure backfired. Thirty thousand Israelites died, in addition to the other 4000. That was a huge defeat.

<sup>17</sup> The shock to Israel's warriors of seeing their most holy relic falling into the hands of the heathen plunged them into despair. Many of them were probably killed after they turned and ran. Worse than dying in defense of what one loves is to die when what one loves is believed to be lost.

<sup>18</sup> What a sorry death, killed in the midst of their hypocrisy. Hophi and Phinehas had ventured forth with the expectation that they could continue to take advantage of their positions, but this was the day that they would come face to face with the One whom they had disdained, to answer for insulting Him and having tyrannized those who believed in Him.

<sup>19</sup> If Eli had doubts about the safety of the Ark, he should never have permitted it to be taken from the Tabernacle. It would seem that by now, his sons had taken control from him. He was the high priest only in name and ceremony, because he had not kicked them out of the service of the Tabernacle earlier. Yet, God still held him responsible for what happened to the Ark and the deaths of all those Israelites, because he did not prevent these tragedies when the correct actions were required years before.

<sup>20</sup> What were Samuel's thoughts when the news was brought back? He probably expected that this was going to happen, but he had not been given any say in the matter. He was not standing at Eli's side when the news came. He was probably so appalled with Eli for permitting his sons to take the Ark that he was too angry to be near him. I think that he was elsewhere, praying, probably in front of the Veil. In my imagination, I see him weeping long before the news came, due to premonitions that the battle was going to be lost and many would die.

<sup>21</sup> The old man is blind and has been sitting for hours, straining for the sound of the returning army. He finally hears shouting, but he cannot make out if it is the sound of victory or of horror.

<sup>22</sup> The runner hurried to Eli, to see if he had a solution to this disaster of the Ark being stolen, but is he was to witness more tragedy.

<sup>23</sup> Eli was very old, and might have been venerated for his great age, but instead was ending his days on a tragic note when his foolishness over his sons caught up with him.

**16 And the man said unto Eli, I come from the battle; I fled today out of the army. And he said unto him, What has happened, my son?**

**17 And the messenger answered and said, Israel fled before the Philistines, and there has been also a great slaughter among the people, and thy two sons also, Hophni and Phinehas, are dead, and the ark of God was taken.<sup>24</sup>**

**18 And it came to pass when he made mention of the ark of God, Eli fell from off the seat backward by the side of the gate,<sup>25</sup> and his neck broke, and he died; for he was an old man and heavy. And he had judged Israel forty years.**

**19 And his daughter-in-law, Phinehas's wife, was with child, near to be delivered, and when she heard the tidings that the ark of God was taken and that her father-in-law and her husband were dead, she bowed herself and travailed, for her pains had come upon her.<sup>26</sup>**

**20 And about the time of her death the women that stood by her said unto her, Fear not, for thou hast given birth to a son. But she did not answer, neither did she regard it.<sup>27</sup>**

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<sup>24</sup> What a way for Eli's ministry to end. Israel's most valuable treasure of the Tabernacle is stolen. It seems to symbolize what Eli permitted when he did not discipline his sons, but allowed them to rule in the Tabernacle. What was he thinking of, to let such evil men have the charge over the Ark? Committing something so holy into their hands? According to Josephus, Eli told his sons to never enter his presence again, if the Ark were taken and they somehow managed to survive the battle. That was hardly an incentive to his sons; they sound like the kind of people who couldn't have cared less about speaking to their father. They had shunned his admonitions for years; they would have no trouble with being deprived of his company.

Eli was nervous about the Ark not being in the Tabernacle, but it was the fact that he had put those two in charge of it that was the greatest risk. God was not going to allow Eli turn a blind eye to his thieving, blaspheming, adulterous sons' activities any more.

By this time, Phinehas was the high priest, as Eli had resigned the position due to his age.

<sup>25</sup> Eli probably had a heart attack. His death may have been both a judgment and a mercy. His death ended the rule of a compromising man and made the way for Samuel to take his place, but the Bible does not indicate that Eli's soul was lost, though his sons were put to death for their wickedness. It could be that, though God was saddened by Eli's weakness, because he still had faith and had accepted God's judgment on his family, rather than rebelling, Eli was spared the trial of grieving for the loss of his sons' lives and their souls.

<sup>26</sup> Shock activated her labour. Josephus said that she was seven months along. Now commenced the curse that had been pronounced upon Eli's descendents, beginning with the difficult labour that brought forth his premature grandson, leaving the child bereaved of his father, his mother, his grandfather, and his uncle on the day of his birth. The child was underdeveloped and probably sickly. The glory had certainly departed from Eli's family.

Phinehas had an older son named Ahitub [1 Samuel 14:3]. Ahitub's son, Ahiah, ministered later for king Saul.

<sup>27</sup> I've always wondered about this woman. Was she just a religious woman who was willing to put up with her husband's unfaithfulness for the advantages of being a daughter-in-law to the high priest, or did she feel humiliated by Phinehas' adulteries? Did she love him, in spite of his faults?

It seems that there was something of true devotion in her nature, that she should be so distressed by the loss of the Ark and of that wicked man. Perhaps she was always hoping that he would change. Now, all hope is gone. Phinehas has been judged; he has lost his soul, and she no longer wants to live. The sadness of this alone makes me weep (literally), even without the tragedy of a little boy losing his mother at birth because she lost her will to live and found no joy, no gleam of hope in his birth to give her concern for him. Her pain was too staggering. She is

**21 And she named the child Ichabod (I-Khavod)<sup>28</sup>, saying, The glory is departed from Israel! (Because the ark of God was taken and because of her father-in-law and her husband.)**  
**22 Therefore, she said, The glory is departed from Israel, for the ark of God is taken.<sup>29</sup>**

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worn out from the struggle of labour, in which she wondered what was the point of giving birth to this child. Did she know of the prophecy that Eli's seed would be sickly and/or poor, and that they would die young? That would have certainly have compounded her depression. She may have been depressed all through her pregnancy due to this.

<sup>28</sup> **H350**

איִכְבוֹד

'îy-ka'bo'd  
 ee-kaw-bode'

From H336 and H3519; (there is) **no glory**, that is, inglorious; lkabod, a son of Phineas: - I-chabod.

<sup>29</sup> The Israelites must have had to flee from Shiloh, after the battle, as archeological evidence shows that it was sacked, at this time. Phinehas' wife may have been quickly removed from the scene in a cart, or she may not have been living in Shiloh. The Levites probably had a plan in place to remove the Tabernacle and its furniture to a place of safety, even if it meant losing their lives to carry out that plan. It was probably their first priority, even above seeing that their wives and children managed to get away safe.

### **Shilo Find May Show It was Sacked by Philistines**

**Evidence of destruction confirms conjecture that Shilo was destroyed after Even Ha'ezer war.**

By Gil Ronen First Publish: 1/7/2013, 12:50 PM

A new archeological find at ancient Shilo fits in with the Biblical narrative regarding the war at Even Ha'ezer, and could confirm scholars' conjectures as to how Shilo was destroyed.

The First Book of Samuel does not say when and how Shilo, which served as the Israelite capital for 369 years, was destroyed. The latest archeological find at the Shilo site – a broken vase and remains of ashes from a fire – indicate large scale destruction. The remains are from the same period in which the War of Even Ha'ezer against the Philistines was waged.

Israel suffered a crushing defeat in that war, which is believed to have been waged near present-day Afek. The two sons of Eli the High Priest were killed, and Eli himself died upon hearing the news. Worst of all, the Holy Ark, which the Israelites had brought to the battleground, was taken by the Philistines.

Archeologists and scholars now have more evidence to back the assumption that after defeating the Israelites at Even Ha'ezer, the Philistines advanced upon Shilo and sacked it. Other Biblical passages, in Psalms and Jeremiah, confirm that Shilo was destroyed by Philistines. End of article.

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