

Ichabod: The Glory Is Gone: The 1st & 2d Battles of Aphek: 34K Israelite KIAs & the Ark Taken as Booty; Eli & His Sons Die; Bubonic Plague Ravages Philistia

- 34- On the occasion found in our passage this opportunity is provided by the Philistines. The biblical account of this conflict and the aftermath of its first two battles are found in 1 Samuel 4:1-18. A synopsis of this passage is provided by:

The Philistines mustered their forces at the city of Aphek / A-fek /, located at the headwaters of the Yarkon River, to prepare for an invasion into the hill country. To meet this threat, the Israelites set up camp near Ebenezer.

1 Samuel 4:2 - And the Philistines drew up in battle array to meet Israel. When the battle spread, Israel was defeated before the Philistines who killed about four thousand men on the battlefield.

After an initial defeat, the Israelites believed that if the visual symbol of the presence of God would go with them into battle they would be victorious. Thus they brought the ark of the covenant from Shiloh to Ebenezer, much to the consternation of the Philistines.¹

1 Samuel 4:3 - When the people came into the camp, the elders of Israel said, "Why has the Lord defeated us today before the Philistines? Let us take to ourselves from Shiloh the ark of the covenant of the Lord that it may come among us and deliver us from the power of our enemies."

v. 4 - So the people sent to Shiloh, and from there they carried the ark of the covenant of the Lord of hosts who sits above the cherubim; and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were there with the ark of the covenant of God.

v. 5 - And it happened as the ark of the covenant of the Lord came into the camp, that all Israel shouted with a great shout, so that the earth resounded.

v. 6 - And 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?" Then they understood that the ark of the Lord had come into the camp.

v. 7 - And the Philistines were afraid for they said, "God has come into the camp." And they said, "Woe to us! For nothing like this has happened before.

v. 8 - "Woe to us! Who shall deliver us from the hand of these mighty gods?"

- 35- The people of Israel assumed that the ark was a good-luck charm they could count on to deliver them in time of crisis. Up to then they had not paid very much attention to the ark, the Shekinah Glory, or the fact the priesthood was in apostasy.

¹ Carl G. Rasmussen, *Zondervan NIV Atlas of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1989), 110.

- 36- But now they need a quick fix for the fact they have been irreverent toward the Lord and irresponsible about their spiritual lives. They were hit with a wake-up call and found wanting. So before the Second Battle of Aphek they sent for the ark to be brought down to the battlefield, convinced its mere presence would insure victory.
- 37- On the ark's arrival into their camp the Israelites "stand up, salute, and sing 'God Bless America.'"
- 38- Not really. But this is a carbon copy of what is presently going on in the United States. The wall of fire has been lifted and the Barbarians have penetrated the walls of Fortress America. Rather than inspire a true revival we imitate the Jews and cling to good-luck charms, have pep rallies, and sing songs that implore the God we have for too long ignored to bless us.
- 39- It needs to be made clear that God is not about to bless us. He is in the process of disciplining us! We are a client nation whose pastors have for half a century fed their sheep heresy. The sheep have bought the lie and become apostate. The result is blasphemy and degeneracy.
- 40- We are under a curse that will not be lifted until we have meaningful submission to divine policies manifest by principles of order in two categories, the establishment code for a client nation and the spiritual code for believers in the Church Age.
- 41- We are becoming a nation divided. The loss of thought has become evident revealing the ever-widening cracks, fissures, and fractures in the commonwealth.
- 42- If we believe that flag flying, song singing, and fund raising are going to defeat Islam, we are mistaken. As mistaken as the Hebrews were about the Greeks who had invaded their land.

1 Samuel 4:10 - So the Philistines fought and Israel was defeated, and every man fled to his tent [**fear of death in battle**], and the slaughter was very great; for there fell of Israel thirty thousand infantry.

v. 11 - And the ark of God was taken; and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, died.

- 43- Principle: A client nation cannot ignore God, rebound, and Bible doctrine and expect to maintain divine protection. Further, the very fact that the wall of fire was lifted permitting the Philistines to attack was in itself a warning that things were spiritually out of whack in Israel.
- 44- When the Second Battle of Aphek was over not only had Israel been soundly smitten, the Philistines had captured the ark of the covenant and killed the priests, Hophni and Phinehas. After the battle a messenger from the tribe of Benjamin was sent from Aphek to Shiloh to inform Eli of the day's events.

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

v. 16 - And the messenger said to Eli, "I am the one who came from the battle line. Indeed, I escaped from the battle line today." And Eli said, "How did things go, my son?"

v. 17 - Then the messenger who brought the news answered and said, "Israel has fled before the Philistines and there has also been a great slaughter among the people, and your two sons also, Hophni and Phinehas, are dead, and the ark of God has been taken."

v. 18 - And it came about when he mentioned the ark of God that Eli fell off the seat backward beside the gate, and his neck was broken and he died, for he was old and obese.

- 45- For the Philistines it was the permissive will of God that these events took place. For Israel, its army, Eli, Hophni, and Phinehas it was the directive will of God.
- 46- Those who were responsible to teach the citizens of Israel the will, plan, and purpose of God perished. The nation Israel was given a wake-up call that left 34,000 of its army dead.
- 47- There was still yet one more casualty. Phinehas's wife was pregnant. When she heard the news that her father-in-law had died, her husband had been killed, and the ark of the covenant had been captured by the Philistines, she went into labor, gave birth to a son, and then died.

1 Samuel 4:20 - And about the time of her death the women who stood by her said to her, "Do not be afraid, for you have given birth to a son." But she did not answer or pay attention.

v. 21 - And she called the boy *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.

v. 22 - And she said, "The glory has departed from Israel, for the ark of God was taken."

- 48- The name *Ichabod* is significant for it provides the perfect explanation for why the wall of fire was lifted in Israel, why the Philistines were permitted to invade, and why the resultant battles led to the death of her father-in-law, husband, and brother-in-law. The name *Ichabod* is the Hebrew proper noun:

איִכָּבֹד / *Ichavoth* / - No *kavoth*: no glory; the absence of glory; or the glory is gone.

- 49- When the people lost the thought they lost the glory that their forebears possessed in the second generation under Joshua. When believers in a client nation lose the thought they invite divine discipline.
- 50- For Israel their rejection of the Levitical sacrifices, feast days, and observances combined with the heretical behavior of the priesthood led to the Lord lifting the wall of fire and the subsequent invasion of heathen predators. (Psalm 76:10)
- 51- Symbolic of the fact that the Lord had removed His protective care for this generation of Jews under His directive will, He allowed the Philistines to capture the ark of the covenant under His permissive will.
- 52- It was a vivid testimony even to such reversionists as Eli and Phinehas's wife that the glory was gone from Israel. And with the departing of the presence of the Shekinah Glory, the Lord provided a window of opportunity for Israel.
- 53- For seven months the Philistines retained the ark. But its presence brought upon them the bubonic plague as can be deduced by the information provided in:

1 Samuel 6:1 - Now the ark of the Lord had been in the country of the Philistines seven months.

v. 2 - And the Philistines called for the priests and the diviners saying, “What shall we do with the ark of the Lord? Tell us how we shall send it to its place.”

v. 3 - And they said, “If you send away the ark to the God of Israel, do not send it empty; but you shall surely return to Him a guilt offering. Then you shall be healed and it shall be known to you why His hand is not removed from you.”

1 Samuel 6:4 - Then they said, “What shall be the guilt offering which we shall return to Him?” And they said, “Five golden tumors and five golden mice according to the number of the lords of the Philistines, for one plague [**bubonic**] was on all of you and your lords.

v. 5 - “So you shall make likenesses of your tumors and likenesses of your mice that ravage the land, and you shall give glory to the God of Israel; perhaps He will ease His hand from you, your gods [**Dagon, Baal, & Ashtoreth**], and your land.”

Bubonic plague apparently broke out among the Philistines when they placed the captured ark of God in an idol temple (1 Samuel 5). This disease is transmitted by rats through infected fleas that they carry on their bodies, the fleas transferring to man for livelihood after the rat host dies of the disease. The disease causes the lymph nodes of the groin and armpits to enlarge to the size of walnuts. These enlarged nodes are known as buboes. The outbreak of bubonic plague was attributed to “rats that are destroying the country” (6:5 [NIV]). The Hebrew word *‘achbar* [עֲכָבַר] doubtless refers to rats as well as mice; no other word for rat occurs in the Bible, though rats evidently existed in the land, since archaeologists have found rat skeletons.²

- 54- The bubonic plague had ravaged every location the Philistines took the ark: Ashdod, Gaza, Ashkelon, Gath, and Ekron—five cities and five “lords” or “mayors” along with their citizens.

² J. D. Douglas, Merrill C. Tenney, et al., eds., *New International Bible Dictionary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1987), 275.