



Icabod: The Glory of God Departs from Israel (1 Sam 4 - 5)

Notes: Week Four

1 Samuel 4-5 (HCSB)

¹ And Samuel's words came to all Israel.

The Ark Captured by the Philistines

Israel went out to meet the Philistines in battle and^[a] camped at Ebenezer while the Philistines camped at Aphek. ²The Philistines lined up in battle formation against Israel, and as the battle intensified, Israel was defeated by the Philistines, who struck down about 4,000 men on the battlefield.

³ When the troops returned to the camp, the elders of Israel asked, "Why did the LORD let us be defeated today by the Philistines? Let's bring the ark of the LORD's covenant from Shiloh. Then it^[b] will go with us and save us from the hand of our enemies." ⁴ So the people sent men to Shiloh to bring back the ark of the covenant of the LORD of Hosts, who dwells between the cherubim. Eli's two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, were there with the ark of the covenant of God. ⁵ When the ark of the covenant of the LORD entered the camp, all the Israelites raised such a loud shout that the ground shook.

⁶ The Philistines heard the sound of the war cry and asked, "What's this loud shout in the Hebrews' camp?" When the Philistines discovered that the ark of the LORD had entered the camp, ⁷ they panicked. "The gods have entered their camp!" they said. "Woe to us, nothing like this has happened before."^[c] ⁸ Woe to us, who will rescue us from the hand of these magnificent gods? These are the gods that slaughtered the Egyptians with all kinds of plagues in the wilderness. ⁹ Show some courage and be men, Philistines! Otherwise, you'll serve the Hebrews just as they served you. Now be men and fight!"

¹⁰ So the Philistines fought, and Israel was defeated, and each man fled to his tent. The slaughter was severe—30,000 of the Israelite foot soldiers fell. ¹¹ The ark of God was captured, and Eli's two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, died.

Eli's Death and Icabod's Birth

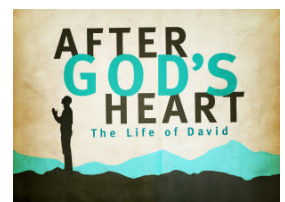
¹² That same day, a Benjaminite man ran from the battle and came to Shiloh. His clothes were torn, and there was dirt on his head. ¹³ When he arrived, there was Eli sitting on his chair beside the road watching, because he was anxious about the ark of God. When the man entered the city to give a report, the entire city cried out.

¹⁴ Eli heard the outcry and asked, "Why this commotion?" The man quickly came and reported to Eli. ¹⁵ At that time Eli was 98 years old, and his gaze was fixed^[d] because he couldn't see.

¹⁶ The man said to Eli, "I'm the one who came from the battle."^[e] I fled from there today."

"What happened, my son?" Eli asked.

¹⁷ The messenger answered, "Israel has fled from the Philistines, and also there was a great slaughter among the people. Your two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, are both dead, and the ark of God has been captured." ¹⁸ When he mentioned the ark of God, Eli fell backward off the chair by the city gate, and since he was old and heavy, his neck broke and he died. Eli had judged Israel 40 years.



¹⁹ Eli's daughter-in-law, the wife of Phinehas, was pregnant and about to give birth. When she heard the news about the capture of God's ark and the deaths of her father-in-law and her husband, she collapsed and gave birth because her labor pains came on her. ²⁰ As she was dying,^[f] the women taking care of her said, "Don't be afraid. You've given birth to a son!" But she did not respond or pay attention. ²¹ She named the boy Ichabod,^[g] saying, "The glory has departed from Israel," referring to the capture of the ark of God and to the deaths of her father-in-law and her husband. ²² "The glory has departed from Israel," she said, "because the ark of God has been captured."

The Ark in Philistine Hands

⁵ After the Philistines had captured the ark of God, they took it from Ebenezer to Ashdod, ² brought it into the temple of Dagon^[h] and placed it next to his statue.^[i] ³ When the people of Ashdod got up early the next morning, there was Dagon, fallen with his face to the ground before the ark of the LORD. So they took Dagon and returned him to his place. ⁴ But when they got up early the next morning, there was Dagon, fallen with his face to the ground before the ark of the LORD. This time, both Dagon's head and the palms of his hands were broken off and lying on the threshold. Only Dagon's torso remained.^[j] ⁵ That is why, to this day, the priests of Dagon and everyone who enters the temple of Dagon in Ashdod do not step on Dagon's threshold.

⁶ The LORD's hand was heavy on the people of Ashdod, terrorizing and afflicting the people of Ashdod and its territory with tumors.^{[k][l]} ⁷ When the men of Ashdod saw what was happening, they said, "The ark of Israel's God must not stay here with us, because His hand is strongly against us and our god Dagon."⁸ So they called all the Philistine rulers together and asked, "What should we do with the ark of Israel's God?"

"The ark of Israel's God should be moved to Gath," they replied. So the men of Ashdod moved the ark. ⁹ After they had moved it, the LORD's hand was against the city of Gath, causing a great panic. He afflicted the men of the city, from the youngest to the oldest, with an outbreak of tumors.

¹⁰ The Gittites then sent the ark of God to Ekron, but when it got there, the Ekronites cried out, "They've moved the ark of Israel's God to us to kill us and our people!"^[m]

¹¹ The Ekronites called all the Philistine rulers together. They said, "Send the ark of Israel's God away. It must return to its place so it won't kill us and our people!"^[n] For the fear of death pervaded the city; God's hand was oppressing them. ¹² The men who did not die were afflicted with tumors, and the outcry of the city went up to heaven.

Footnotes:

- a. [1 Samuel 4:1](#) LXX reads *In those days the Philistines gathered together to fight against Israel, and Israel went out to engage them in battle. They*
- b. [1 Samuel 4:3](#) Or *He*
- c. [1 Samuel 4:7](#) Lit *yesterday or the day before*
- d. [1 Samuel 4:15](#) Lit *his eyes stood*; 1Kg 14:4
- e. [1 Samuel 4:16](#) LXX reads *camp*
- f. [1 Samuel 4:20](#) LXX reads *And in her time of delivery, she was about to die*
- g. [1 Samuel 4:21](#) = *Where is Glory?*
- h. [1 Samuel 5:2](#) A Philistine god of the sea, grain, or storm
- i. [1 Samuel 5:2](#) Lit *to Dagon*
- j. [1 Samuel 5:4](#) LXX; Hb reads *Only Dagon remained on it*
- k. [1 Samuel 5:6](#) LXX adds *He brought up mice against them, and they swarmed in their ships. Then mice went up into the land and there was a mortal panic in the city.*
- l. [1 Samuel 5:6](#) Perhaps bubonic plague
- m. [1 Samuel 5:10](#) DSS, LXX read *Why have you moved . . . people?*
- n. [1 Samuel 5:11](#) DSS, LXX read *Why don't you return it to . . . people?*

Holman Christian Standard Bible - *Study Bible*¹

1 Samuel 4-5

4:1 The Philistines migrated to the Judean coastline during the twelfth century B.C. and began threatening Israel during the days of the judges (chaps. 13-16). The Israelites camped at Ebenezer about 20 miles west of Shiloh, while the Philistines camped at Aphek across the plain to the west. Israel's enemies had pushed far north from their home along Israel's southern coastline and now threatened the central territory.

4:3 Why did the LORD let us be defeated? is literally "Why did the Lord strike us?" The people associated the ark of the LORD's covenant ([Ex 25:10-22](#)) with God's presence, and they assumed taking the ark into battle would guarantee victory over their enemies. This is the equivalent of trying to manipulate God through a magical talisman.

4:4 The phrase dwells between the cherubim is a reference to God's dwelling in the cloud over the mercy seat of the ark ([Lv 16:2](#)). Ironically, despite their priestly office, Hophni and Phinehas were probably the two least worthy individuals to carry the ark.

4:5 The loud shout as the ark... entered the camp further emphasizes the Israelites' incorrect association of God's presence with the ark. God's blessing did not automatically come because of the ark's presence.

4:7 The gods have may possibly be translated "God has." Either way, the Philistines feared for their lives.

4:8 The Philistines either incorrectly assumed the Israelites worshiped many gods, or they had seen Israel's idolatry and drawn that conclusion.

4:9 Show some courage is literally "strengthen yourselves." The language may suggest the Philistines currently had control over the Israelites and feared losing it.

4:12 A Benjaminite was a man from the tribal territory of Benjamin to the south. Shiloh was part of Ephraim's territory. Clothes were torn... dirt on his head were expressions of mourning ([2Sam 1:2](#)).

4:13 "Keeping vigil" might be a better translation than watching since Eli was now blind ([v. 15](#)). The Hebrew word translated cried out always has a negative connotation, as does the related word "outcry" in the next verse.

4:14 In his haste, this man had run by Israel's former high priest. Now he returned to report to Eli and apprise him of the battle.

4:16 The words I'm the one suggest the man was a designated messenger to bring the news of the battle ([v. 17](#); cp. [2Sam 18:19-23](#)).

4:19 Eli's daughter-in-law, the wife of Phinehas, had lost three family members—her father-in-law... husband, and brother-in-law—and that news, coupled with the news of the capture of God's ark, suddenly brought her labor pains.

1. Jeremy Royal Howard, ed., *HCSB Study Bible*, (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2010), *WORDsearch* CROSS e-book, Under: "1 Samuel 4 & 5".

[4:21](#) Ichabod means "where is the glory?" with the clear implication, as she then said, that the glory has departed from Israel.

[4:22](#) The wife of Phinehas incorrectly associated God's glorious presence with the presence of the ark of God. However, she was right in the sense that she believed life apart from God's presence was not worth living.

[5:1](#) The trip from Ebenezer to Ashdod was about 19 miles. Ashdod—along with Ashkelon, Ekron, Gaza, and Gath—was one of Philistia's five major cities.

[5:2](#) Dagon was originally an agricultural and/or storm god of Canaan and Mesopotamia, but the Philistines made him head of their pantheon. Perhaps the Philistines thought they should place the ark next to his statue as a symbolic gesture of Dagon's defeat of the Lord in battle.

[5:4](#) Dagon's head and the palms of his hands were broken off (lit "cut off"), suggesting Dagon's fall was no accident. The positioning of head and palms on the threshold nearby also ruled out an accident.

[5:5](#) From then on the priests of Dagon and all his worshipers avoided stepping on Dagon's threshold—a threshold that marked the place of his defeat before God.

[5:6](#) The Lord now oppressed the people of Ashdod, plaguing them as He had plagued the Egyptians ([4:8](#)). Tumors ([Dt 28:27](#)) probably describe symptoms of bubonic plague, a disease spread by rodents ([1Sam 6:4](#)). Others believe the term describes boils or hemorrhoids.

[5:8](#) Perhaps Gath, located more than 20 miles away at the mouth of the Elah Valley, was on friendlier terms with Israel ([21:10](#); [27:3](#); [2Sam 15:18](#); [1Ki 2:39](#)), prompting relocation of the ark.

[5:9](#) The Philistines' plan failed as God then brought the tumors to Gath.

[5:10](#) The Philistine citizens of Ekron, located 10 miles north of Gath, cried out (see note at [4:13](#)) in fear of their lives when the ark of...God came to their city.

[5:12](#) On outcry, see note at [4:13](#).

English Standard Version - Study Bible²

1 Samuel 4-5

4:1b-7:1 *Story of the Ark of God.* The ark of the covenant was the visible sign of the presence and power of God. Previously housed in the Shiloh sanctuary, it now takes center stage. After a disastrous defeat by the Philistines, the elders of Israel realize that the defeat was the work of the Lord, but there is no indication that they seek to know how they have sinned. Instead, they decide that their own action of bringing the ark to the battlefield will save them, almost as if they were forcing the Lord to do their will. But the ark is not a charm. Israel is defeated, the ark is captured by the Philistines, and Eli and his sons die. Probably Shiloh itself is destroyed soon after, since Eli's descendants go to Nob ([21:1-9](#); [22:6-23](#)). God, however, cannot let the enemy think that they have defeated him. For seven months he causes plagues and disturbances wherever the ark is taken, until the Philistines give up and send the ark back to Israel with a tribute of gold. It remains in Kiriath-jearim until David takes it to Jerusalem ([2 Samuel 6](#)). Samuel is completely absent from this story (reappearing in [1 Sam. 7:3](#)), which indicates that these events took place while he was growing up. The Philistines, who appear in both Judges and Samuel, were one of the "Sea Peoples" who migrated from across the Aegean and settled on the coastal plain of southern Palestine about 1200 B.C., establishing a league of city-states. (The Philistines of Genesis were probably from an earlier wave of immigrants from across the Aegean.) They seem to have adopted the Canaanite language and proper names and gods soon after they arrived (see notes on 1 Sam. [1 Sam. 5:2](#); [31:10](#)). They were skilled in pottery and also in metallurgy ([13:20](#)).

4:1b-22 *Capture of the Ark.* After suffering defeat in battle at the hands of the Philistines, the people of Israel try to use the ark of the covenant to ensure victory; instead, the Philistines defeat them again, killing Eli's two sons and taking the ark into exile. When Eli hears of it, he suddenly dies. For reflections on these events cf. [Ps. 78:58-66](#) and [Jer. 7:8-15](#).

4:1b The **Philistines** make their first appearance in 1-2 Samuel. **Aphék** was 8 miles (13 km) east of Tel Aviv, north of the Philistia plain, and just to the west of the hill country of Ephraim. The Shillo River, which goes through the center of Ephraim, comes out of the mountains nearby. The location of **Ebenezer** is uncertain, but it may have been a site 2 miles (3.2 km) farther east. The Philistines were interested in expanding their control to the north.

4:3-4 **from Shiloh.** The **ark of the covenant** had been "in the temple of the LORD" in Shiloh ([3:3](#)). (On the details of the ark, cf. [Ex. 25:10-22](#); [37:1-9](#); and [illustration](#).) Moses was commanded by the Lord to put the tablets of the covenant, or the "testimony," into the ark ([Ex. 25:16](#); [Deut. 10:5](#); cf. [1 Kings 8:9](#)). **Cherubim** often appear in the iconography of the ancient Near East as hybrid figures, with animal and human characteristics. **enthroned.** The ark was the visible sign of the holy presence of the Lord, whose real throne is on high, above the heavens. But it was more than just a sign, for the ark was also the focal point of God's actual presence among his people ([Ex. 25:22](#) says, "There I will meet with you, and from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim that are on the ark of the testimony, I will speak with you..."; cf. [Num. 7:89](#); also [Ex. 29:42-43](#); [30:6](#), [36](#); [37:1-9](#); [40:34-38](#); [Lev. 16:2](#); [Num. 17:4](#)). The conception of the ark as a visible sign of the Lord's presence gave a military importance to the ark (as can be seen in [Num. 10:33-36](#) and [Joshua 3-4](#); [6](#)); it functioned as a battle safeguard and showed that the Lord was present and fighting for Israel. This understanding was certainly behind the actions of the elders in the present story. They may have thought that the Lord smote them because they had not trusted in the ark and had neglected it. Or perhaps they just thought that it would perform a miracle if used magically. That the ark would inevitably grant victory was a persistent idea that even the present story was not able to dispel. For the phrase **the LORD of hosts**, see note on [1 Sam. 1:3](#); cf. [chart](#). **Let us bring the ark of the covenant of the LORD... that it may come among us.** The Hebrew might also

2. Lane T. Dennis, ed., *ESV Study Bible, The: English Standard Version*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Bibles, 2008), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, Under: "1 Samuel 4 & 5".

mean “that he [the LORD] may come,” but in either case, the elders are treating the Lord as a thing. By saying “bring,” the narrator is probably conveying the idea that the people treated this sacred object disrespectfully as an instrument through which victory might be attained. Surely, the covenant people had lost the sense of awe toward God’s holy presence. They **brought from there the ark**. The verb is literally “carried” (Hb. *nasa*’); to “carry” the ark by its poles was the proper way to move it ([Ex. 25:14](#)); see also [2 Sam. 6:13](#); cf. [2 Sam. 6:3](#), where “carried” is literally “made to ride” (Hb. *rakab*). That **Hophni and Phinehas** (cf. [1 Sam. 2:12-17, 27-36](#)) were there suggests that they supported the move, at least to some extent. Eli, however, seems to have had reservations ([4:13](#)).

The Journey of the Ark of the Covenant in 1-2 Samuel

1 Sam. 3:3	The Lord calls to Samuel who is sleeping in the tent of meeting, “where the ark of God was”
1 Samuel 4	Philistines capture the ark (for seven months: 1 Sam. 6:1)
1 Sam. 5:1-7	Philistines bring the ark to Ashdod, setting it up next to the idol Dagon
1 Sam. 5:8-9	Philistines bring the ark to Gath
1 Sam. 5:10-12	Philistines send the ark to Ekron
1 Sam. 6:10-15	Philistines return the ark with guilt offering to Beth-shemesh
1 Sam. 6:19-21	The Lord strikes 70 men for looking upon the ark
1 Sam. 7:1-2	Men of Kiriath-jearim take the ark to the house of Abinadab (where it stays for 20 years)
1 Sam. 14:18	Saul commands Ahijah to bring the ark to the war camp
2 Sam. 6:2-5	David begins to move the ark to Jerusalem on a cart
2 Sam. 6:6-7	The Lord strikes Uzzah dead for holding on to the ark
2 Sam. 6:10-11	David takes the ark to the house of Obed-edom, where it stays for three months
2 Sam. 6:12-17	David brings the ark to Jerusalem, and places it inside the tent he pitched for it
2 Sam. 15:24-25	Zadok brings the ark to David, who commands him to carry it back to Jerusalem
2 Sam. 15:29	Zadok and Abiathar carry the ark back to Jerusalem

The Ark of the Covenant

The Ark of the Covenant



4:3 The **elders of Israel** appear throughout the history of Israel. They were a group of senior tribal leaders entrusted with important decisions. They are mentioned from the time of the sojourn in Egypt through to the NT (e.g., [Ex. 3:16](#); [Num. 11:16](#); [Josh. 24:31](#); [1 Kings 20:7](#); [Ezra 5:5](#); [Matt. 16:21](#); [Acts 22:5](#)). Other nations also had them ([Num. 22:7](#)). Cities also were governed by elders (e.g., [Deut. 19:12](#); [1 Sam. 11:3](#); [16:4](#); [1 Kings 21:8](#)). In Samuel the elders of Israel are instrumental in establishing a king. They ask Samuel for a king ([1 Sam. 8:4](#)); Saul is concerned with their opinion ([15:30](#)); they are leaders in choosing a king after Saul's death ([2 Sam. 3:17](#); [5:3](#)); and they are in Absalom's council ([2 Sam. 17:4](#)).

4:5 a mighty shout. The Israelites are confident in the ark, but the rest of the story will show that they have failed to approach God's presence in faith and obedience.

4:6 In Samuel, the term **Hebrews** is usually used by the Philistines as a designation for the Israelites ([14:11](#); [29:3](#)). The term apparently derives from the name Eber ([Gen. 10:21-25](#)). So in the biblical tradition, "Hebrew" is an ethnic term (see [Gen. 14:13](#)) distinct from religio-political designations such as "Israel," "sons of Israel," etc.

4:7-8 A god... the gods. The Hebrew word for "god(s)" in both cases is *'elohim*, the plural of *'eloah* ("god"). *Elohim* is the usual word to refer to the God of Israel (e.g., [Gen. 1:1](#)); the plural form is used to express majesty, but it is always used with a singular verb. In [1 Sam. 4:7](#), the Philistines think that the ark is a god (or God) that has come (singular); in [v. 8](#), they use the plural form for "struck." The narrator seems to be mocking their misunderstanding of the one God of Israel. [Exodus 7-12](#) describes how God "struck the Egyptians with every sort of plague." **Struck the Egyptians... in the wilderness** probably reflects the Philistines' ignorance about the exact course of events during Israel's wilderness wanderings.

4:10 Israel was defeated. In view of [v. 3](#), one cannot suppose that the Philistines on their own were the cause. **every man to his home.** Literally, "every man to his tent." This is a common cliché for disbanding an army, either by decision ([Judg. 20:8](#); [1 Sam. 13:2](#); [2 Sam. 20:1](#), [22](#); [1 Kings 12:16](#)) or because of defeat ([2 Sam. 18:17](#); [19:8](#); [2 Chron. 25:22](#)).

4:12 The messenger **ran** a distance of nearly 22 miles (35 km). Tearing one's **clothes**, often along with putting **dirt** on one's **head**, was the normal reaction to grief or horror in the OT (e.g., [2 Sam. 1:2](#), [11](#); [3:31](#); [13:19](#), [31](#); [15:32](#); [Job 2:12](#)).

4:13 Eli was **sitting** beside the gate ([v. 18](#)) **watching** the road. But he could not see the messenger when he entered. Presumably the people of the city brought the messenger to Eli to tell him the news in person.

4:17 Your two sons... are dead is the sign that Eli had been told to expect as a forewarning of the near demise of his house ([2:34](#)), but it seems that he is even more concerned about the **ark**.

4:19 Bowed is literally "crouched," the position for giving birth. It was probably a premature delivery brought on by shock.

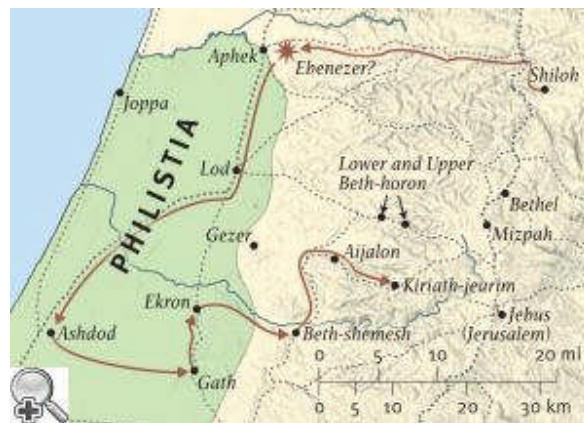
4:21-22 Like Eli, Phinehas's wife seems more concerned with the **ark** than with her husband. **Ichabod** means "where is the glory?" She mourns for Israel without the presence of God. **Departed** (Hb. *galah*) does not mean just to "go away," but to be "exiled" (see ESV footnote). She doesn't know that the Lord is going to demonstrate his glory in the land of Philistia, as seen in [ch. 5](#).

5:1-12 *The Ark in Philistia.* The Philistines think their victory indicates that their god, Dagon, is superior to the God of Israel, and they bring the ark into Dagon's temple to honor their god. God, however, shows his power over Dagon.

5:1 Ashdod and Ekron were the two northernmost cities of the Philistine pentapolis (five ruling cities: Ashdod, Gaza, Ashkelon, Gath, Ekron; see [6:17](#)). Ashdod was near the coast, on the important Via Maris (Sea Road), about 30 miles (48 km) south of Aphek (see [map](#)).

The Ark's Travels in [1 Samuel 3-7](#)

After suffering losses in battle against the Philistines at Ebenezer, the Israelite forces called for the ark of the covenant to be brought to the battle from Shiloh. But the Israelites were defeated again, and the Philistines captured the ark. The ark's presence in each Philistine city caused the people to suffer terrible tumors, so it was sent away to another city. Eventually the ark was returned to Israel at Beth-shemesh, and then it was brought to Kiriath-jearim, where it remained for some 20 years.



5:2 Dagon is a deity known from Early Bronze Age Mesopotamian and northern Syrian cities such as Ebla, Mari, Emar, and Ugarit. The Philistines apparently adopted him as their principal god ([Judg. 16:23](#); [1 Chron. 10:10](#)) soon after their arrival in Canaan. It was once thought that the name meant “fish,” but this view is no longer accepted. More recently, derivation from a word meaning “grain” has been proposed, but it is not certain. The practice of capturing the enemy's gods was common in ancient Near East warfare and is often mentioned in documents such as the Assyrian royal inscriptions. It was understood that a people whose gods were in enemy hands was completely conquered.

5:3 The next morning, the statue of Dagon is found in a position suggesting submission **before the ark of the LORD**. This has become a battle between deities. Dagon cannot protect himself or his people from the hand of the Lord ([v. 6](#)).

5:5 The temple **threshold** was considered especially worthy of respect because it separated sacred and common areas; similarly, doorposts, which marked the entrance to a home, were important (e.g., [Ex. 12:7](#); [21:6](#); [Deut. 6:9](#)). The narrator makes the observation that the Philistines **to this day** still bear witness to the humiliation of their god. This custom is said to have survived in Gaza into the first centuries A.D.

5:6 The **tumors**, together with an apparently abnormal number of mice in the area ([6:5](#)), have led most commentators to identify the disease as bubonic plague. Yet [5:12](#) has no reference to the mice at all. See note on [6:4](#).

5:8 The five ([6:4](#), [16](#)) **lords** were the rulers of the five ruling Philistine cities (i.e., the Philistine pentapolis; see [6:17](#)). **Gath** was the city of Goliath ([17:4](#)), Achish ([21:10](#); [27:2](#)), and Ithai and the 600 Gittites ([2 Sam. 15:18-19](#)). Gath is probably Tel ets-Tsafi, about 12 miles (19 km) east of Ashdod and 5 miles (8 km) south of Ekron ([1 Sam. 5:10](#)), at the foot of the Judean hills.

5:10 Ekron is another city of the Philistine pentapolis, most probably Tel Migne, 22 miles (35 km) west of Jerusalem, on the western border between Philistia and Judah. This journey of the ark, taken from city to city by its panicky “captors,” is almost a parody of a triumph march. Ekron has been discovered and excavated by archaeologists. A monumental inscription, belonging to the early seventh century B.C., has been found in what appears to be a temple complex. It is a plea to a goddess to protect Achish, the ruler of Ekron, and to bless him with long life, and to bless his land.

5:11 a deathly panic. I.e., one that causes death.

NLT Life Application Study Bible³

1 Samuel 4-5

4:1 The Philistines, descendants of Noah's son Ham, settled along the southeastern Mediterranean coast between Egypt and Gaza. They were originally one of the "Sea Peoples" who had migrated to the Middle East in ships from Greece and Crete. By Samuel's time, these warlike people were well established in five of Gaza's cities in southwest Canaan and were constantly pressing inland against the Israelites. Throughout this time, the Philistines were Israel's major enemy.

4:3 The Ark of the Covenant contained the Ten Commandments given by God to Moses. The Ark was supposed to be kept in the Most Holy Place, a sacred part of the Tabernacle that only the high priest could enter once a year. Hophni and Phinehas desecrated the room by unlawfully entering it and removing the Ark.

The Israelites rightly recognized the great holiness of the Ark, but they thought that the Ark itself—the wood and metal box—was their source of power. They began to use it as a good luck charm, expecting it to protect them from their enemies. A symbol of God does not guarantee his presence and power. Their attitude toward the Ark came perilously close to idol worship. When the Ark was captured by their enemies, they thought that Israel's glory was gone ([4:19-22](#)) and that God had deserted them ([7:1, 2](#)). God uses his power according to his own wisdom and will. He responds to the faith of those who seek him.

Israelites Versus Philistines

The Israelites and Philistines were archenemies and constantly fought. Here are some of their confrontations, found in 1 and 2 Samuel. When the Israelites trusted God for the victory, they always won.

<i>Location of the Battle</i>	<i>Winner</i>	<i>Comments</i>	<i>Reference</i>
Aphek to Ebenezer	Philistines	The Ark was captured and Eli's sons killed	1 Samuel 4:1-11
Mizpah	Israelites	After the Ark was returned, the Philistines planned to attack again, but God confused them. Israel chased the Philistines back to Beth-car	1 Samuel 7:7-14
Geba	Israelites under Jonathan	One detachment destroyed	1 Samuel 13:3, 4
Gilgal	A standoff	The Israelites lost their nerve and hid	1 Samuel 13:6-17
Micmash	Israelites	Jonathan and his armor bearer said it didn't matter how many enemies there were. If God	1 Samuel

3. *Life Application Study Bible*, (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1988), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 414 - 417.

		was with them, they would win. They began the battle, and the army completed it	13:23-14:23
Valley of Elah	Israelites	David and Goliath	1 Samuel 17:1-58
?	Israelites	David killed 200 Philistines to earn a wife	1 Samuel 18:17-30
Keilah	Israelites under David	David protected the threshing floors from Philistine looters	1 Samuel 23:1-5
Aphek, Jezreel, to Mount Gilboa	Philistines	Saul and Jonathan killed	1 Samuel 29:1; 31:1-13
Baal-perazim	Israelites	The Philistines tried to capture King David	2 Samuel 5:17-25
Gath	Israelites	There was very little trouble with the Philistines after this defeat	2 Samuel 8:1
?	Israelites	Abishai saved David from a Philistine giant	2 Samuel 21:15-17
Gob	Israelites	Other giants were killed, including Goliath's brother	2 Samuel 21:18-22

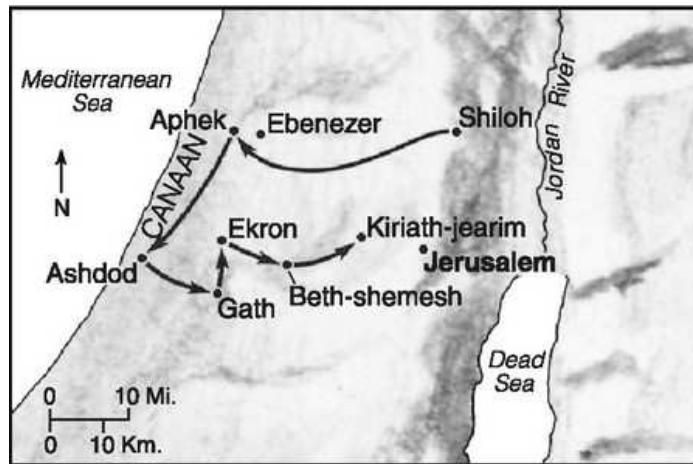
[4:4](#) "The LORD of Heaven's Armies, who is enthroned between the cherubim," conveys that God's presence rested on the Ark of the Covenant between the two gold cherubim (or angels) attached to its lid. The people believed that the Ark would bring victory when Hophni and Phinehas carried it into battle.

[4:5-8](#) The Philistines were afraid because they remembered stories about God's intervention for Israel when they left Egypt. But Israel had turned away from God and was clinging to only a form of godliness, a symbol of former victories.

People (and churches) often try to live on the memories of God's blessings. The Israelites wrongly assumed that because God had given them victory in the past, he would do it again, even though they had strayed far from him. Today, as in Bible times, spiritual victories come through a continually renewed relationship with God. Don't live off the past. Keep your relationship with God new and fresh.

[4:11](#) This event fulfills the prophecy in [2:34](#) stating that Eli's sons, Hophni and Phinehas, would die "on the same day."

[4:12](#) At this time, the city of Shiloh was Israel's religious center ([Joshua 18:1](#); [1 Samuel 4:3](#)). The Tabernacle was permanently set up there. Because Israel did not have a civil capital—a seat of national government—Shiloh was the natural place for a messenger to deliver the sad news from the battle. Many scholars believe that it was during this battle that Shiloh was destroyed ([Jeremiah 7:12](#); [26:2-6](#); also see the note on [7:1](#)).



The Ark's Travels

Eli's sons took the Ark from Shiloh to the battlefield on the lower plains at Ebenezer and Aphek. The Philistines captured the Ark and took it to Ashdod, Gath, and Ekron. Plagues forced the people to send the Ark back to Israel, where it finally was taken by cattle-drawn carts to Beth-shemesh and on to the home of Eleazar in Kiriath-jearim.

4:18 Eli was Israel's judge and high priest. His death marked the end of the dark period of the judges when most of the nation ignored God. Although Samuel was also a judge, his career saw the transition from Israel's rule by judges to the nation's monarchy. He began the great revival that Israel would experience for the next century. The Bible does not say who became the next high priest (Samuel was not eligible because he was not a direct descendant of Aaron), but Samuel acted as high priest at this time by offering the important sacrifices throughout Israel.

4:19-22 This incident illustrates the spiritual darkness and decline of Israel. This young boy, Ichabod, was supposed to succeed his father, Phinehas, in the priesthood, but his father had been killed because he was an evil man who desecrated the Tabernacle. The terror of God's leaving his people overshadowed the joy of childbirth. When sin dominates our lives, even God-given joys and pleasures seem empty.