

Exegetical Notes – 1 Samuel 4:1b-11

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1 Samuel 4:1b-11

Verses 4:1b-2

Now the Israelites went out to fight against the Philistines. The Israelites camped at Ebenezer, and the Philistines at Aphek. ² The Philistines deployed their forces to meet Israel, and as the battle spread, Israel was defeated by the Philistines, who killed about four thousand of them on the battlefield.

- The Philistines were a powerful group of people who migrated from Crete. As they fought to gain territory in the area, they became Israel's chief threat during the time of Samson, Samuel and the reigns of Saul and David.
- The troops of Israel went out to stop the Philistines from taking their territory. They camped at Ebenezer. The Philistines camped at Aphek, a city on the border of Israeli territory.
- Israel was defeated in the battle.

Verse 3

³ When the soldiers returned to camp, the elders of Israel asked, "Why did the LORD bring defeat on us today before the Philistines? Let us bring the ark of the LORD's covenant from Shiloh, so that he may go with us and save us from the hand of our enemies."

- After the battle, the elders of Israel considered why they had lost.
- They resolved to bring The Ark of the Covenant from its place in the Tabernacle at Shiloh to their camp. The Ark represented God's presence with the people of Israel. It was believed to be God's throne on earth. While it was to be revered by Israel, it was not to be treated as a god among them. It represented God's presence among them. In this case, the elders brought it to their camp as if it had some supernatural ability and would insure Israel's victory over the Philistines.

Verse 4

⁴ So the people sent men to Shiloh, and they brought back the ark of the covenant of the LORD Almighty, who is enthroned between the cherubim. And

Eli's two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, were there with the ark of the covenant of God.

- Orders were sent by the elders to Shiloh and the Ark was brought to the camp at Ebenezer.
- Hophni and Phinehas, the corrupt sons of Eli, Israel's High Priest, accompanied the Ark.

Verses 5-9

⁵ When the ark of the LORD's covenant came into the camp, all Israel raised such a great shout that the ground shook. ⁶ Hearing the uproar, the Philistines asked, "What's all this shouting in the Hebrew camp?"

When they learned that the ark of the LORD had come into the camp, ⁷ the Philistines were afraid. "A god has come into the camp," they said. "Oh no! Nothing like this has happened before. ⁸ We're doomed! Who will deliver us from the hand of these mighty gods? They are the gods who struck the Egyptians with all kinds of plagues in the wilderness. ⁹ Be strong, Philistines! Be men, or you will be subject to the Hebrews, as they have been to you. Be men, and fight!"

- When the Ark arrived at Ebenezer, a great cry went up from the army.
- Hearing the commotion in the Israeli camp, the Philistines sought to know what was happening. When they learned that the Ark was present in the camp, they assumed that it was Israel's god. They were filled with fear because they knew what YHWH had done to the Egyptians. But they rallied themselves to fight like men or become the slaves of the Hebrews.

Verses 10-11

¹⁰ So the Philistines fought, and the Israelites were defeated and every man fled to his tent. The slaughter was very great; Israel lost thirty thousand foot soldiers. ¹¹ The ark of God was captured, and Eli's two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, died.

- Battle ensued. Again, the Hebrews were defeated by the Philistines.
- Israel lost 30,000 men in the battle and the Ark was captured by the Philistines.
- Eli's sons, Hophni and Phinehas died in the battle. God executed his judgment on the family of Eli (see 1 Samuel 3:27-36).

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