

1 Samuel 4:17

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And the messenger answered and said, Israel is fled before the Philistines, and there hath been also a great slaughter among the people, and thy two sons also, Hophni and Phinehas, are dead, and the ark of God is taken.

Analysis

The report comes in ascending severity: Israel fled before the Philistines (bad), great slaughter occurred (worse), both sons are dead (devastating), and the Ark is captured (unthinkable). Each element builds on the previous, climaxing with the Ark. The messenger knows what matters most to Eli and saves it for last. The structure forces Eli - and the reader - to absorb each level of disaster before confronting the ultimate catastrophe. The Ark of God is in enemy hands.

Historical Context

The report's structure follows ancient conventions for delivering bad news in stages. Each element compounds the previous: military defeat, casualties, personal loss, and finally the theological crisis of the Ark's capture.

Related Passages

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Study Questions

1. Why does the messenger structure his report in ascending order of severity?
2. How does the narrative force readers to experience the cumulative weight of disaster?

Interlinear Text

לִפְנֵי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְמִבְּשָׁרְךָ יָצָא
answered And the messenger and said is fled Israel before
H6030 H1319 H559 H5127 H3478 H6440

פִּלְשָׁתִים מְגַפֵּה הָיָה גַּדְעָן גָּדוֹל הַפִּימָת
the Philistines slaughter and there hath been also a great
H6430 H1571 H4046 H1419 H1961

בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל שְׁתַיִם יָמִים שְׁתַיִם מֵתִים
among the people and thy two sons are dead also Hophni and Phinehas
H5971 H1571 H8147 H1121 H4191 H2652 H6372

נִלְקַחַת יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי יִמְלֹךְ עַל
and the ark of God is taken
H727 H430 H3947

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