

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

וַיַּעַן	הַמְבִישׁ ר	וַיֹּאמֶר	נָס	יִשְׂרָאֵל	לִפְנֵי י	
answered	And the messenger	and said	is fled	Israel	before	
H6030	H1319	H559	H5127	H3478	H6440	
פְּלִשְׁתֵּי יָם	וְגַם	מִגֶּפֶה ה	גְּדוֹלָה ה	הַיְּתֵה ה		
the Philistines	H1571	slaughter	and there hath been also a great	H1961		
H6430		H4046	H1419			
בְּעַם	וְגַם	שְׁנֵי י	בָּנֵי יְב	יָמֵתוּ	חֲפְנִי	וּפְיִנְחָס
among the people	H1571	and thy two	sons	are dead	also Hophni	and Phinehas
H5971		H8147	H1121	H4191	H2652	H6372
וְאָרֹן	הָאֱלֹהִים יָם	נִלְקָחָהּ:				
and the ark	of God	is taken				
H727	H430	H3947				

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