

1 Samuel 4:18

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And it came to pass, when he made mention of the ark of God, that he fell from off the seat backward by the side of the gate, and his neck brake, and he died: for he was an old man, and heavy. And he had judged Israel forty years.

Analysis

Eli's death comes specifically at 'mention of the ark of God' - not at news of his sons' deaths but at the Ark's capture. This reaction reveals what mattered most to him. He falls backward, breaks his neck, and dies. The descriptors - old, heavy, forty-year judge - seem almost obituary-like. The phrase 'he had judged Israel forty years' provides formal closure to his ministry. Whatever his failures, Eli's final moments show his heart was oriented toward God's honor, not merely personal loss.

Historical Context

Eli's death by falling backward fulfills the judgment pattern while suggesting his instinctive reaction to devastating news. The forty-year judgeship places him among the major judges in terms of tenure, despite his compromised record.

Related Passages

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Study Questions

1. What does Eli's reaction to the Ark's capture versus his sons' deaths reveal about his priorities?
2. How should we assess Eli's overall ministry given both his failures and his final response?

Interlinear Text

וַיְהִי י	כַּהֲזָכִיר וְ	אֶת	אֶרְוֹן	הָאֱלֹהִים יִם		
H1961	And it came to pass when he made mention	H853	of the ark	of God		
	H2142		H727	H430		
לְ	מֵעַל	הָ כִסֵּא	אָחֳרָאֵת	בְּעֵדוֹ	יָד	הַשַּׁעַר
that he fell	H5921	from off the seat	backward	by	the side	of the gate
H5307		H3678	H322	H1157	H3027	H8179
וַתִּשָּׁבֶר	מִפְּרָקָתוֹ	וַיָּמָת	כִּי	זָקֵן	הָאִישׁ	וַיָּבֶד
brake	and his neck	and he died	H3588	for he was an old	man	H3515
H7665	H4665	H4191		H2204	H376	
וְהָוָא	שָׁפֵט	אֶת	יִשְׂרָאֵל	אַרְבָּעִים	שָׁנָה:	
H1931	And he had judged	H853	Israel	forty	years	
	H8199		H3478	H705	H8141	

Additional Cross-References

Psalms 69:9 (Parallel theme): For the zeal of thine house hath eaten me up; and the reproaches of them that reproached thee are fallen upon me.