

1 Samuel 4:2

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And the Philistines put themselves in array against Israel: and when they joined battle, Israel was smitten before the Philistines: and they slew of the army in the field about four thousand men.

Analysis

The initial defeat - four thousand Israelites killed - prompts self-examination. The elders' question 'Wherefore hath the LORD smitten us?' shows theological awareness: defeat comes from the LORD, not merely from Philistine superiority. Their solution, however, reveals dangerous theology: bring the Ark to make it 'save us.' The Ark becomes a magical talisman rather than symbol of covenant relationship. They seek the benefits of God's presence without the requirements of covenant faithfulness. This religious manipulation will prove disastrous.

Historical Context

The Ark of the Covenant represented God's throne and presence among His people. Its association with military victory (Numbers 10:35; Joshua 6) led to the temptation to treat it as a guarantee of divine assistance regardless of Israel's spiritual condition.

Related Passages

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

Psalms 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Study Questions

1. How do people today attempt to manipulate religious symbols for personal benefit?
2. What is the difference between trusting God and treating religious objects as magical protections?

Interlinear Text

וַעֲרֹכּוּ	פְּלִשְׁתֵּי יָם	לְקֹדֶם אֶת	יִשְׂרָאֵל	
put themselves in array	And the Philistines	against	Israel	
H6186	H6430	H7125	H3478	
וַתִּטְּשׁ	הַמִּלְחָמָה	וַיִּגָּד	יִשְׂרָאֵל	לִפְנֵי י
and when they joined	battle	was smitten	Israel	before
H5203	H4421	H5062	H3478	H6440
פְּלִשְׁתֵּי יָם	וַיִּצְּחוּ	בַּמַּעֲרָכָה	בַּשָּׂדֶה	כְּאַרְבַּעַת
And the Philistines	and they slew	of the army	in the field	about four
H6430	H5221	H4634	H7704	H702
אִישׁ: אֶלְפֵי יָם				
thousand	men			
H505	H376			

Additional Cross-References

Lamentations 3:40 (Parallel theme): Let us search and try our ways, and turn again to the LORD.