

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

Psalm 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

ישׁׁבָא לְ לִקְבָּ אֶת פְּלִשְׁתִּים עַרְכֵּן
put themselves in array And the Philistines against Israel
H6186 H6430 H7125 H3478

לִפְנֵי יִשְׁׁבָא לְ וְתַטְשֵׁ פְּמַלְכָתָם הַ
and when they joined battle was smitten Israel before
H5203 H4421 H5062 H3478 H6440

כְּאֶרְבָּב עַת בְּשַׁׁךְ הַ בְּמִעְרָכָה וְ 1 פְּלִשְׁתִּים
And the Philistines and they slew of the army in the field about four
H6430 H5221 H4634 H7704 H702

אַלְפִים אַיִשׁ
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.