

The Israelites Are “Achan” Again (1 Samuel 4:5-9)

1 Samuel 4:1 should read “Now Israel went out to battle...” to show that Samuel, as the only prophet in Israel, was not consulted. God is going to judge the nation of Israel beginning with the house of Eli for their idolatry.

1. The Returning Rebels (v.1-2)

- The Philistines were encamped at Aphek, which is located in Israel. This suggests that the Philistines were the aggressors.

2. The Rhetorical Response (v.3)

- The elders asked a rhetorical question. They concluded that the reason why they were defeated is because they did not have the ark.

3. Rabbit Foot Theology (v.3)

- The elders would have been familiar with Israel’s history in the wilderness and Promised Land. In the past, the presence of the ark brought about military victory (Numbers 10:35; 14:44; Joshua 6).
- Rabbit Foot Theology: Man’s attempt to harness the power of God through an object or equation. It is the desire for people to control God, but not to seek Him; to use Him but not submit to Him. They want the gift of God independent from the Giver; they want power without the Provider.
- The elders, Israelites, and Hophni and Phinehas are convinced that they have God “by the tail.” Since the ark is so intricately tied to His glory, God must give them the victory. Their problem is that they confuse God’s ascribed glory with His intrinsic glory.

4. The Reinforcements (v.4)

- Hophni and Phinehas are next to the ark of the covenant. Can the nation of Israel really appeal to the promises of God represented by the ark when that ark is being carried by two reprobate priests who despise the LORD? (2:12, 17, 22, 3:13). As long as the situation persists, God will not bless Israel.

5. The Reflection and Recollection of Jericho (v.5-9)

Both the Israelites and the Philistines react to the arrival of the ark.

Israelites (v.5)

- *Shout*: this shout echoes a similar message as the campaign of the Promised Land (Joshua 6:2-5).
- *Ark*: Joshua had the ark with him (Joshua 6:6, 8-12).

The Israelites think that they can re-create the “good old days” of Joshua’s campaign.

Philistines: (v.6-9)

- *Inquiry* (v.6): They are unsure of what this “screaming” is about. They eventually find out (most likely from a scout).
- *Idolatry* (v.7, 8): Their knowledge of the God of Israel is flawed. They say “a god” has come into their camp. They thought the ark was “a god.” The Philistines were polytheistic. It is not surprising that they think Israel has many gods (Judges 3:6; 6:10; 10:6, 13-14; 18:14-24).
- *Inaccuracy* (v.8): There were not multiple “gods” that struck the Egyptians. Additionally, the location was wrong. It was in Egypt, not the wilderness. Also, this has “happened before.” (Joshua 6).
- *Irony* (v.9): “Take courage” is a theme in Joshua’s campaign (Joshua 1:6, 9, 18; 10:25, 23:6). The famous war cry did not have the same effect on the Philistines that it had on Jericho. Instead, it had an opposite effect; it aroused the Philistines to fight harder.

6. Remember Achan (Joshua 6-7)

- *Rich Pedigree*: He came from a prominent family of nobility through the line of Judah (Joshua 7:1). His grandfather and perhaps his father were spared as young children from the infanticide decree of Pharaoh (Exodus 1:15-20; 12:37). His grandfather would have witnessed all of the judgments in Egypt, while his father would have experienced the miracles in the wilderness. Achan would have been younger than 20 years old, which would have qualified him for entrance into the Promised Land (Numbers 14:29; Deuteronomy 20:34-40). He also owned many oxen, donkeys and sheep (Joshua 7:24).
- *Reach for the Devoted Things*: God’s specific directions were given to Joshua and all of Israel (Joshua 6:17-19, 24) yet Achan committed idolatry (Joshua 7:20).

God will not bless the nation of Israel as sin goes unpunished and unchecked (7:12-13). God has established conditional (Deuteronomy 28) and unconditional (Genesis 15; Jeremiah 30:22) covenants in Scripture.

7. The Response of the Elders (Joshua 7:6-9; 1 Samuel 4:3)

- The people of Israel and the elders at both Ai (Joshua 7) and Aphek (1 Samuel 4) suffer a defeat from the hands of their enemies. While they both ask the same question “why?” their responses are polar opposites.
- The elders after the defeat of Ai (Joshua 7:6-9) consecrated themselves in humble submission before the LORD, looking to Him. The elders after the defeat at Aphek (1 Samuel 4:3) were not humble and did not seek the LORD. Instead, in their idolatry, they demand the ark, not the Word of the LORD (1 Samuel 3:21).
- Hophni, Phinehas, the elders, and the soldiers are not much different than the Philistines; all of them idolize the ark.