

## The Ark and the Philistines

Samuel grew into manhood and was soon recognized as Israel's prophet. He frequently went to Shiloh where the Ark of the Covenant had been permanently placed. It was there God often spoke to Samuel and he in turn would convey God's wishes to the people of Israel. The Lord through Samuel ordered Israel to war with the Philistines who occupied a significant portion of the land of Judah. At this point Saul had not been anointed King.

Accordingly, the forces of Israel went out to fight against the Philistines. The Israelites camped at Ebenezer, and the Philistines at Aphek. The cities were located just northeast of Shiloh near the Mediterranean coastline in what would later be known as Samaria.



The first battle resulted in Israel being defeated. Israel lost 4,000 men however they were able to complete a tactical retreat into the safety of their main campsite. There they licked their wounds and wondered, "Why did the Lord bring defeat upon us today? Let us bring the Ark of the Lord's covenant from Shiloh, so that it may go with us and save us from the hand of our enemies."

It was concluded the loss took place because they did not have the Ark representing the presence of God. So it was agreed they would send a delegation to Shiloh to get the

Ark of the Covenant. When the Ark was carried into the camp, the Israelites raised such a great shout that the ground shook. Hearing the uproar, the Philistines asked, "What's all this shouting in the Hebrew camp?" When they learned that the Ark of the Lord had come into the camp they were terrified for they remembered the many victories of the Israelites both in Egypt and in Canaan. All such victories occurring under the ensign of their sacred box.

It was this fear of failure that motivated a renewed courage. Their commanders shouted, "Be strong, Philistines! Be men, or you will be subject to the Hebrews. Be men, and fight!" So the Philistines fought, and the Israelites were again defeated. The slaughter was very great; Israel lost 30,000 good men. The ark of God was captured and carried to Ashdod, a Philistine city. The men of Israel returned to their homes in shame and disgust.



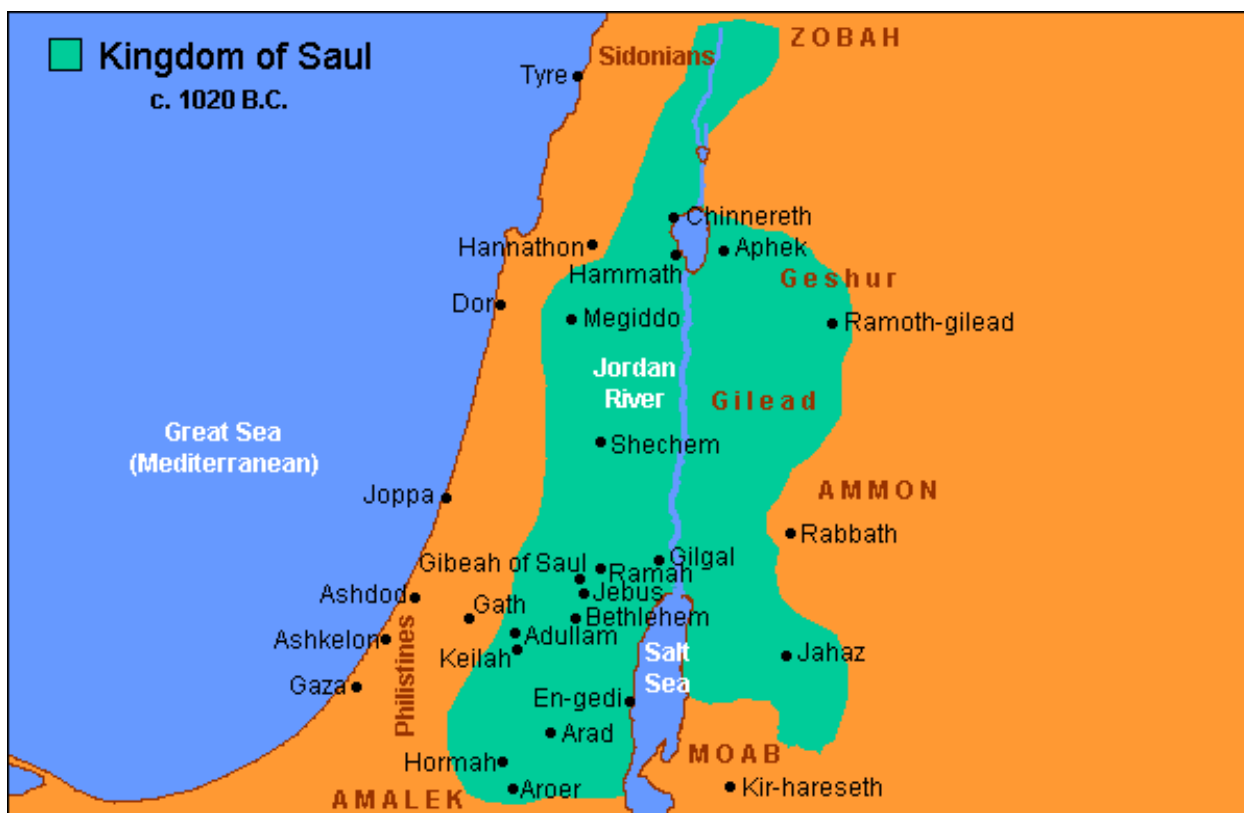
The Philistine soldiers proudly carried the Ark into Dagon's temple and set it beside the statue of Dagon, the fish god and supreme deity of Philistia. When the people of Ashdod rose early the next day, there was Dagon, face down on the ground. They took Dagon and put him back in his place. But the following morning when they looked inside their pagan temple, there was Dagon, again on the ground! This time his head and hands had been broken off.

Soon the city was gripped in terror as a strange malady was afflicting both young and old. Tumors began to grow until all of the Ashdodites were covered with painful tumors and many were dying. When the men of Ashdod saw what was happening, they

said, "The Ark of the God of Israel must not stay here with us, because his hand is heavy upon us and upon Dagon our god."

So the city fathers met to discuss the matter, "What shall we do with their sacred box?" It was unanimous, "Move the thing to Gath." But after they had moved it to Gath, the Lord's hand was against that city, throwing it into a great panic. God afflicted the people of that city, both young and old, with an outbreak of the same kind of tumors.

So the Gathites sent the Ark of God to Ekron in hopes the move would stop the tumors which had now plagued most of Philistia. Clearly moving the Ark did not stop the plague of tumors or death. All of Philistia was experiencing the trauma. There was loss of life abounding but still it was thought "maybe if we move the box to Ekron the plague will stop?" However, once again, moving the Ark did not help. So a super council meeting attended by representatives from the five major cities of Philistia: Ashdod, Gath, Ekron, Ashkelon and Gaza was held to determine what should be done.



By now people in large numbers were dying and rats began to appear in great numbers. No doubt the dead bodies had attracted all manner of vermin.

The council met and it was unanimously agreed, "Send the box away; let it go back to its own place, or it will kill us and our people." For death had filled the city with panic." To make sure the return was done properly the council leaders called for the priests and the diviners and said, "What shall we do with the sacred box of Israel? Tell us how we should send it back."

They answered, "If you return it to Israel, do not send it away empty, but by all means send a guilt offering along with it. Then you will be healed."

The Philistines asked, "What guilt offering should we send?" They replied, "Five gold tumors and five gold rats, according to the number of the Philistine rulers, because the same plagues have struck all five of our major cities. Make models of the tumors and of the rats that are destroying the country, and pay honor to Israel's god. Perhaps then he will stop plaguing our land. You must not harden your hearts as the Egyptians and Pharaoh did. Now then, get a new cart ready, with two cows that have calved and have never been yoked. Hitch the cows to the cart. Take the box and put it on the cart, and in a chest beside it put the gold tumors and rats. Send the cart off in the direction of Beth Shemesh and watch what the wild cows do. If they continue toward Beth Shemesh, then we will know it was the their god who brought this great disaster on us. But if it does not, then we will know that it was not his hand that struck us but merely bad luck." So they did this. The cows went straight toward Beth Shemesh, keeping on the road and bellowing and pitching all the way; they did not turn to the right or to the left. The rulers of the Philistines followed them as far as the border of Beth Shemesh. All were convinced the hand of Israel's god had brought them great misery. Again the Word of the Lord was disseminated in a strange but wonderful way. Many just might have placed their faith in Israel's God and though Philistia won the first two battles, God Almighty won the war!

Now the people of Beth Shemesh were harvesting their wheat in the valley, and when they looked up and saw the Ark, they rejoiced at the sight. The cart came to the field of Joshua of Beth Shemesh, and there it stopped beside a large rock. The people chopped up the wood of the cart and sacrificed the cows as a burnt offering to the Lord. The Levites took down the Ark of the Lord, together with the chest containing the gold objects, and placed them on the large rock.

But God struck down some of the men of Beth Shemesh, putting seventy of them to death because they had looked into the ark of the Lord, something the law of Moses declared as a "no no." The people mourned because of the heavy blow the Lord had dealt them. The men of Beth Shemesh asked, "Who can stand in the presence of the Lord, this holy God? Where can we send the Ark?"

So they sent messengers to the people of Kiriath Jearim, saying, "The Philistines have returned the Ark of the Lord. Come down and take it up to your city."

So the brave men of Kiriath Jearim came and carried the Ark to Abinadab's house and Eleazar his son was assigned the responsibility to guard the sacred Ark of the Lord.

These are the gold tumors the Philistines sent as a guilt offering to the Lord--one each for Ashdod, Gaza, Ashkelon, Gath and Ekron. And the number of the gold rats was according to the number of Philistine fortified towns and villages belonging to the five rulers.

This is the story of how the Ark arrived in Hemath at the city of Kiriath Jearim where it stood for more than 20 years. It was David who would later decide to move the Ark to Jerusalem where he had prepared a tent of worship.

For more information concerning the Ark and its stay in Philistia: see 1Sa 4:1-7:1 and to learn more about the act of David returning the Ark to Jerusalem see 1Ch 15:24-16:1.

#### Israel Goes To War

1Sa 4:1 And Samuel's word came to all Israel. Now the Israelites went out to fight against the Philistines. The Israelites camped at Ebenezer, and the Philistines at Aphek.

1Sa 4:2 The Philistines deployed their forces to meet Israel, and as the battle spread, Israel was defeated by the Philistines, who killed about four thousand of them on the battlefield.

1Sa 4:3 When the soldiers returned to camp, the elders of Israel asked, "Why did the LORD bring defeat upon us today before the Philistines? Let us bring the ark of the LORD'S covenant from Shiloh, so that it may go with us and save us from the hand of our enemies."

1Sa 4:4 So the people sent men to Shiloh, and they brought back the ark of the covenant of the LORD Almighty, who is enthroned between the cherubim. And Eli's two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, were there with the ark of the covenant of God.

1Sa 4:5 When the ark of the LORD'S covenant came into the camp, all Israel raised such a great shout that the ground shook.

1Sa 4:6 Hearing the uproar, the Philistines asked, "What's all this shouting in the Hebrew camp?" When they learned that the ark of the LORD had come into the camp,

1Sa 4:7 the Philistines were afraid. "A god has come into the camp," they said. "We're in trouble! Nothing like this has happened before.

1Sa 4:8 Woe to us! Who will deliver us from the hand of these mighty gods? They are the gods who struck the Egyptians with all kinds of plagues in the desert.

1Sa 4:9 Be strong, Philistines! Be men, or you will be subject to the Hebrews, as they have been to you. Be men, and fight!"

1Sa 4:10 So the Philistines fought, and the Israelites were defeated and every man fled to his tent. The slaughter was very great; Israel lost thirty thousand foot soldiers.

1Sa 4:11 The ark of God was captured, and Eli's two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, died.

#### The Ark in Ashdod and Ekron

1Sa 5:1 After the Philistines had captured the ark of God, they took it from Ebenezer to Ashdod.

1Sa 5:2 Then they carried the ark into Dagon's temple and set it beside Dagon.

1Sa 5:3 When the people of Ashdod rose early the next day, there was Dagon, fallen on his face on the ground before the ark of the LORD! They took Dagon and put him back in his place.

1Sa 5:4 But the following morning when they rose, there was Dagon, fallen on his face on the ground before the ark of the LORD! His head and hands had been broken off and were lying on the threshold; only his body remained.

1Sa 5:5 That is why to this day neither the priests of Dagon nor any others who enter Dagon's temple at Ashdod step on the threshold.

1Sa 5:6 The LORD'S hand was heavy upon the people of Ashdod and its vicinity; he brought devastation upon them and afflicted them with tumors.

1Sa 5:7 When the men of Ashdod saw what was happening, they said, "The ark of the god of Israel must not stay here with us, because his hand is heavy upon us and upon Dagon our god."

1Sa 5:8 So they called together all the rulers of the Philistines and asked them, "What shall we do with the ark of the god of Israel?" They answered, "Have the ark of the god of Israel moved to Gath." So they moved the ark of the God of Israel.

1Sa 5:9 But after they had moved it, the LORD'S hand was against that city, throwing it into a great panic. He afflicted the people of the city, both young and old, with an outbreak of tumors.

1Sa 5:10 So they sent the ark of God to Ekron. As the ark of God was entering Ekron, the people of Ekron cried out, "They have brought the ark of the god of Israel around to us to kill us and our people."

1Sa 5:11 So they called together all the rulers of the Philistines and said, "Send the ark of the god of Israel away; let it go back to its own place, or it will kill us and our people." For death had filled the city with panic; God's hand was very heavy upon it.

1Sa 5:12 Those who did not die were afflicted with tumors, and the outcry of the city went up to heaven.

### The Ark Returned to Israel

1Sa 6:1 When the ark of the LORD had been in Philistine territory seven months,

1Sa 6:2 the Philistines called for the priests and the diviners and said, "What shall we do with the ark of the LORD? Tell us how we should send it back to its place."

1Sa 6:3 They answered, "If you return the ark of the god of Israel, do not send it away empty, but by all means send a guilt offering to him. Then you will be healed, and you will know why his hand has not been lifted from you."

1Sa 6:4 The Philistines asked, "What guilt offering should we send to him?" They replied, "Five gold tumors and five gold rats, according to the number of the Philistine rulers, because the same plague has struck both you and your rulers.

1Sa 6:5 Make models of the tumors and of the rats that are destroying the country, and pay honor to Israel's god. Perhaps he will lift his hand from you and your gods and your land.

1Sa 6:6 Why do you harden your hearts as the Egyptians and Pharaoh did? When he treated them harshly, did they not send the Israelites out so they could go on their way?

1Sa 6:7 "Now then, get a new cart ready, with two cows that have calved and have never been yoked. Hitch the cows to the cart, but take their calves away and pen them up.

1Sa 6:8 Take the ark of the LORD and put it on the cart, and in a chest beside it put the gold objects you are sending back to him as a guilt offering. Send it on its way,

1Sa 6:9 but keep watching it. If it goes up to its own territory, toward Beth Shemesh, then the LORD has brought this great disaster on us. But if it does not, then we will know that it was not his hand that struck us and that it happened to us by chance."

1Sa 6:10 So they did this. They took two such cows and hitched them to the cart and penned up their calves.

1Sa 6:11 They placed the ark of the LORD on the cart and along with it the chest containing the gold rats and the models of the tumors.

1Sa 6:12 Then the cows went straight up toward Beth Shemesh, keeping on the road and lowing all the way; they did not turn to the right or to the left. The rulers of the Philistines followed them as far as the border of Beth Shemesh.

1Sa 6:13 Now the people of Beth Shemesh were harvesting their wheat in the valley, and when they looked up and saw the ark, they rejoiced at the sight.

1Sa 6:14 The cart came to the field of Joshua of Beth Shemesh, and there it stopped beside a large rock. The people chopped up the wood of the cart and sacrificed the cows as a burnt offering to the LORD.

1Sa 6:15 The Levites took down the ark of the LORD, together with the chest containing the gold objects, and placed them on the large rock. On that day the people of Beth Shemesh offered burnt offerings and made sacrifices to the LORD.

1Sa 6:16 The five rulers of the Philistines saw all this and then returned that same day to Ekron.

1Sa 6:17 These are the gold tumors the Philistines sent as a guilt offering to the LORD--one each for Ashdod, Gaza, Ashkelon, Gath and Ekron.

1Sa 6:18 And the number of the gold rats was according to the number of Philistine towns belonging to the five rulers-- the fortified towns with their country villages. The large rock, on which they set the ark of the LORD, is a witness to this day in the field of Joshua of Beth Shemesh.

1Sa 6:19 But God struck down some of the men of Beth Shemesh, putting seventy of them to death because they had looked into the ark of the LORD. The people mourned because of the heavy blow the LORD had dealt them,

1Sa 6:20 and the men of Beth Shemesh asked, "Who can stand in the presence of the LORD, this holy God? To whom will the ark go up from here?"

1Sa 6:21 Then they sent messengers to the people of Kiriath Jearim, saying, "The Philistines have returned the ark of the LORD. Come down and take it up to your place."

1Sa 7:1 So the men of Kiriath Jearim came and took up the ark of the LORD. They took it to Abinadab's house on the hill and consecrated Eleazar his son to guard the ark of the LORD.

#### David Returns the Ark

1Ch 15:25 So David and the elders of Israel and the commanders of units of a thousand went to bring up the ark of the covenant of the LORD from the house of Obed-Edom, with rejoicing.

1Ch 15:26 Because God had helped the Levites who were carrying the ark of the covenant of the LORD, seven bulls and seven rams were sacrificed.

1Ch 15:27 Now David was clothed in a robe of fine linen, as were all the Levites who were carrying the ark, and as were the singers, and Kenaniah, who was in charge of the singing of the choirs. David also wore a linen ephod.

1Ch 15:28 So all Israel brought up the ark of the covenant of the LORD with shouts, with the sounding of rams' horns and trumpets, and of cymbals, and the playing of lyres and harps.

1Ch 15:29 As the ark of the covenant of the LORD was entering the City of David, Michal daughter of Saul watched from a window. And when she saw King David dancing and celebrating, she despised him in her heart.

1Ch 16:1 They brought the ark of God and set it inside the tent that David had pitched for it, and they presented burnt offerings and fellowship offerings before God.