

Week 3 – 24 Feb 2024

The Ark is captured, Eli dies

Background

Samuel is growing up: possibly around 20-25 at the time of this events. He is well known throughout the nation of Israel. Eli and his sons are still alive, although Eli is seriously old by now and his sons must be seriously middle-aged. It may be assumed that their behaviour had not changed and that Eli no longer had the capability of ruling the nation. That role has effectively passed to Samuel although this seems not to be official until ch.7

“These three chapters (*1 Sam 4-7*) are regarded by scholars to be a coherent and distinctive narrative unit. They are conveniently referred to as “the ark narrative” because, apart from the powerful, invisible working of Yahweh, the ark is the only “character” who acts in the story. Miller and Roberts have effectively argued that the “hand” of Yahweh is the main theme.... This narrative is theologically “primitive” in the sense that Yahweh acts directly, without recourse to a secondary agent.... the casting of the narrative does not invite us to an explanation of the action, but to an awed silence before the one who is inexplicable, inscrutable and finally irresistible.”¹

Scripture

Please read Judges 13: 1; 1 Samuel 3:19 – 5:12

Historical notes

1. One estimation² suggests that Israel’s defeat by the Philistines occurred around 1160 b.c. There is no record in Judges following 13:1 that the Philistines are subsequently fully defeated, although they were subdued and left Israel alone in the days of Samuel (7:10-14), and in the days of Solomon they appear to cause little trouble.
2. A similar estimation suggests that the Israelites went to war against the Philistines (1 Samuel 4:1-10) around 1140 b.c.

Resources

For information regarding the Philistines see the following:

<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Philistine-people>

<https://www.biblicalarchaeology.org/daily/people-cultures-in-the-bible/who-were-philistines-where-did-they-come-from/>

<https://www.worldhistory.org/Philistines/>

¹ First and Second Samuel, Interpretation. W Brueggeman. John Knox Press. 1990. Pp 28-29.

² Thompson’s “Chain Reference” Authorised Version. Other dates appear elsewhere.

Questions for Discussion

1. What was the likely cause and effect of the various events listed in this particular story as recorded in 1 Sam 3:20; 4:2-3; 4:10; 4:18; 5:8-12?
2. How do you understand the relationship between the God, the Ark and the Israelites in 4:1b-11?
3. Was the statement made by the wife of Phinehas in 4:22 true? Why / why not?
4. What do you make of the events that occurred in the temple of Dagon in 5:1-5?
5. How do you understand the relationship between the God, the Ark and the Philistines in 5:7-12?
6. What do you think of the statement by Brueggemann (see Resources above)
7. What can WE take from this story that will help us *personally* in our understanding of and walk with God today?

