

Oct 7, }  
1883, }**ELI'S DEATH.**{ 1 Sam. 4 :  
10-18. }

**GOLDEN TEXT.**—"His sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not."—1 Sam. 3: 13.

**CENTRAL TRUTH.**—Judgment begins at the house of God.

**CONNECTION.**—Something like twenty years had passed. The Philistines were oppressing Israel. For some reason, perhaps connected with the rising influence of the prophet Samuel (4: 1), they made war on Israel. The Israelites were defeated. They had asked no counsel of Samuel; and in their defeat, instead of seeking counsel of the Lord, they sent to Shiloh to bring the ark, vainly supposing that would ensure them victory. The lesson opens with a second battle.

**NOTES.**—*The Philistines*: inhabitants of the plain between the Mediterranean and the highlands of Judea; a prosperous, powerful, and warlike people. Though their territory had been assigned to the tribe of Judah, they not only retained possession thereof, but made themselves masters of a large portion of the inheritance of Israel before the reign of David. *Benjamin*: one of the twelve tribes; located between Ephraim on the north and Judah on the south. *Shiloh*: the seat of the tabernacle for more than 300 years. North of Jerusalem about seventeen miles. From Aphek, where the engagement took place, the distance is variously estimated at from thirty to forty miles.

**I. JUDGMENT ON ISRAEL.**—Ver. 10.—The Philistines fight. They heard the shouting of the Israelites, as the ark came into their camp; and though afraid of what they called "these mighty Gods" (ver. 8), they encouraged each other to fight. The result was a great defeat and slaughter of Israel. They fled every man into his tent; and many continued to dwell in "tents" instead of houses; and in other ways making little progress in civilization. Every man now endeavoured to save himself.

Ver. 11.—And the ark of God was taken: *Kitto* says—"The ark was becoming an idol; and therefore the ark was suffered to be made captive by the unbelievers." It was superstition, and not religion, that brought the ark from Shiloh. Hophin and Phinebas were slain: God had foretold their death. (2: 34.) Their place was at Shiloh, purely ministering in their priestly office. Their sending the ark to the camp was the last act of a corrupt life.

Ver. 12.—A man of Benjamin: we read of Benjaminites, left-handed slingers, etc.; and many suppose that tribe to have possessed many men of extraordinary agility. This man would be one of the "runners" attached to every Eastern army, to carry orders and news. Clothes rent, etc.: the Easterns are very demonstrative: rending garments, dust on head, loud outcries, etc., are outward signs of emotion suppressed by Europeans. The distance run was about twenty miles.

Ver. 13.—Eli sat upon a seat: Many critics read it "his seat;" i.e., his official seat at or near the Sanctuary. (1: 9.) This would account for the news being known in the city before it reached him. Watching: whether by the wayside leading to the Sanctuary, or at the gate of the city, he was anxiously waiting for tidings from the camp. His heart trembled for the ark of God: it had been taken against his will; but he should have authoritatively prevented it! And he now trembled for its safety. All the city cried out: when the man told of the great defeat and slaughter, and the death of the two priests, and the losing of the ark, loud lamentations broke out through the city.

**III. JUDGMENT ON ELI'S HOUSE.**—Ver. 14.—What meaneth the noise? Eli heard the lamenting of the people, and the tumult of rushing feet, and enquired what it was? And the messenger came in "hastily"—in all the breathless excitement in which he had arrived a few minutes before—and told him.

Ver. 16.—Eli was ninety-eight years old; infirm, and blind with age.

Ver. 16.—I am he that came out of the army: Some one had told Eli that a man had come out of the army; but naturally they would keep back the bad tidings—leaving them for the man himself to tell: so he announces himself as the messenger to the aged priest who cannot see him. What is there done my son? he was impatient to know the result of the battle, and the safety of the ark of God.

Ver. 17.—Israel is fled: bad news indeed. A great slaughter among the people: Worse still. Thirty thousand had fallen. However terrible modern battles may be, there is nothing like the great proportion of slain now. O for the time when men "shall learn war no more!" Hophin and Phinebas are dead: the man, designedly, leaves his worst news to the last. The intelligence is getting heavier and more terrible as it proceeds. The ark of God is taken: the climax is now reached! The ark, made by Moses, "according to the pattern showed him in the Mount," and containing the tables of the Testimony, engraved at Sinai, was gone! Carried off to grace some idol-temple among the Philistines! Yet since God was no longer in the hearts of the people, it could matter little about the presence of the ark! This losing of the ark was known as "the Captivity," down to the time when the Babylonian Captivity gave a new meaning to the expression.

Ver. 18.—He fell from off the seat backward: the defeat and slaughter of Israel, and the death of his two sons, tore his heart with grief and sorrow; but when the "ark was taken," he could bear up no more. His seat was without a back: that would have made it a throne—reserved only for kings. He, fainting, fell backward. By the side of the gate: 2 Sam. 18: 4 shows us how David "stooped by the gate side," as the people passed out. So Eli's seat would be "flush" with the side of the gate, but not occupying any of an already-narrow roadway under the arch. And he died: He was an old man, heavy and inactive; and in the fall "his neck brake," and he instantly died. How many possibilities in his life, and yet how little had he done! He had judged Israel forty years: The Hebrew says "forty," and the Septuagint says "twenty." The "forty" undoubtedly include the twenty of Samsou's authority. We may take it that he had been High Priest forty years; and in the twenty years since the death of Samson, had been alone in "Judging" Israel.

**PRACTICAL TEACHINGS.**

1. Good men's faults are not glossed over in God's Word.
2. The ark could not save Israel from defeat, when God had deserted their standard. We may be in the Church, yet not be in grace.
3. In a good sense, every Christian should "tremble for the ark of God." Our personal safety and interest is a small thing, compared with the interest and safety of the cause of Christ.
4. The men who had just been shouting at the arrival of the ark, were soon fleeing "every man into his own tent." Not self-confidence and boasting, but a good cause, and God on our side is what we need:

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AGED ELI FALLS DEAD.

**PRIZE BIBLE QUESTIONS FOR SEPTEMBER.**

[For particulars of prizes, conditions, etc., etc., see the January number.]

25. Give the first instance in the Bible where the children of the righteous are made partakers of special privileges and blessings.