

Adult Bible Class

The Book of First Samuel

Lesson 3 - May 1, 2022

1 Samuel Chapter 6

1 Samuel 6:1 (NKJV) Now the ark of the Lord was in the country of the Philistines seven months.

The ark of the covenant had been foolishly taken into battle by Hophni and Phinehas, the wicked sons of the High Priest, Eli. There in battle against Israel's longtime enemy, the Philistines, Hophni and Phinehas died, thirty thousand Israelite soldiers were slain, and the ark was taken by the Philistines. The city of Shiloh where the tabernacle had been erected was now desolate, and the tabernacle was in a smoldering heap of ruins - without its priests and the ark of God.

The Philistines put the ark of God in the temple of their god, Dagon. During the night, the image of Dagon fell over, and when the morning came, they found the idol god "bowing" before the ark. The Philistines set their idol back up again, and during the next night, the statue fell over again - its head and hands broken off.

This was the beginning of a time of plagues, tumors, and death for the Philistines. The ark went from city to city until the Philistines had had enough of death, misery, and trouble. Seven months passed, then:

1 Samuel 6:2 And the Philistines called for the priests and the diviners, saying, "What shall we do with the ark of the Lord? Tell us how we should send it to its place."

Realizing that their troubles were because they had captured the ark of God in battle, the Philistines decided to send the ark back to Israel. They had developed a healthy respect for it, so they determined to send it back in a proper way. The Philistines believed in good luck and bad luck, and it was up to the priests and diviners of Dagon to instruct them in what to do and when to do it so they would have "good luck" in returning the ark to Israel.

3 So they said, "If you send away the ark of the God of Israel, do not send it empty; but by all means return it to Him with a trespass offering. Then you will be healed, and it will be known to you why His hand is not removed from you."

There are many, many levels of the knowledge of God among people. Some people's knowledge is limited to the fact that there is a God. Some people have heard about prayer and worship, but they haven't participated in it. Some people respect the Bible, even though they have never studied it.

The Philistine people wanted to be done with their suffering because of the ark, and they wanted to be healed from their afflictions. They also wanted to know the proper way to return the ark to Israel. The Philistine priests and diviners apparently had some knowledge of Israel's God, so they offered their best advice concerning the return of the ark to Israel.

A “trespass offering” is a part of the worship of the God of Israel. The Philistines knew enough about Israel’s God (Israel being their close neighbor) to know that He should be appeased with an offering for sin. However, the trespass offering that they would send did not at all resemble what was commanded in the Law of Moses (see Scripture concerning the trespass offering - also called the guilt offering in some versions - in Leviticus 5:14-19).

4 Then they said, “What *is* the trespass offering which we shall return to Him?” They answered, “Five golden tumors and five golden rats, according to the number of the lords of the Philistines. For the same plague was on all of you and on your lords. **5** Therefore you shall make images of your tumors and images of your rats that ravage the land, and you shall give glory to the God of Israel; perhaps He will lighten His hand from you, from your gods, and from your land.

No plague of rats was mentioned in the previous chapter, but they must have been present as part of their troubles - and if the plague was bubonic plague or something similar, rats would have been involved in that plague (infected fleas on the rats spread the disease). It was the custom of heathen peoples to bring to a god tokens or fashioned images representing the deliverance desired. In this case, they needed deliverance from the tumors and the rats. There were five images, because there were five cities in Philistia with five ruling lords - Ashdod, where the ark was first taken, Gath, Ekron, Ashkelon, and Gaza.

6 Why then do you harden your hearts as the Egyptians and Pharaoh hardened their hearts? When He did mighty things among them, did they not let the people go, that they might depart?

Although it had been well over 300 years since God delivered His people from Egypt, yet the fame of this great deliverance was still known and discussed. The Philistines are warned against stubbornness. Will it take ten plagues before the Philistines return the ark to where it belongs?

7 Now therefore, make a new cart, take two milk cows which have never been yoked, and hitch the cows to the cart; and take their calves home, away from them. **8** Then take the ark of the Lord and set it on the cart; and put the articles of gold which you are returning to Him as a trespass offering in a chest by its side. Then send it away, and let it go. **9** And watch: if it goes up the road to its own territory, to Beth Shemesh, then He has done us this great evil. But if not, then we shall know that *it is* not His hand *that* struck us—it happened to us by chance.”

So they devise a test to see if all of their trouble is from the hand of Israel’s God or if it happened by chance. It seems that they did not know the proper way for the ark to be transported (and even if they did, they had no authorized priests to carry it). The Philistines took two milk cows that had never before pulled a cart. The cows had never worn a yoke and had never been driven. They were, after all, milk cows. They took the calves away from them and penned them up. They hitched the cows to a new cart, and put the ark on the cart along with a chest containing their “trespass offering.” The cows with cart were set on a road that they had never traveled before. Then the Philistines watched to see what would happen.

We can be sure that the Philistines were happier to see the ark leave than they were when they captured it! If they were hoping to receive a ransom from

Israel, their hopes completely vanished. Israel never attempted to rescue the ark. Instead of demanding a ransom, the Philistines sent it back with a gold offering!

10 Then the men did so; they took two milk cows and hitched them to the cart, and shut up their calves at home. **11** And they set the ark of the Lord on the cart, and the chest with the gold rats and the images of their tumors. **12** Then the cows headed straight for the road to Beth Shemesh, and went along the highway, lowing as they went, and did not turn aside to the right hand or the left. And the lords of the Philistines went after them to the border of Beth Shemesh.

Beth Shemesh was about ten miles away, a long journey for a milk cow to travel away from her calf. Beth Shemesh was in Israel, and it happened to be a Levitical city (one of the cities set aside for the Levites to live in). The cows went straight there, not deviating at all on the path. They were lowing, so this indicates that they longed for their calves, but the hand of God directed them to take their precious cargo to Israel where it belonged. This was truly a miracle of God - God's power over the beasts of the field and nature itself. The Philistines got their answer - their troubles were not by chance. They were from the hand of Israel's God.

Hophni and Phinehas didn't know their God - they lived in continual rebellion against Him. They were responsible for losing the ark to the enemy of Israel. However, these milk cows were subject to God.

Isaiah 1:3 The ox knows its owner
And the donkey its master's crib;
But Israel does not know,
My people do not consider."

1 Samuel 6:13 Now *the people of* Beth Shemesh *were* reaping their wheat harvest in the valley; and they lifted their eyes and saw the ark, and rejoiced to see *it*.

Since it was the time of the wheat harvest in Israel, it would have been late May or early June.

14 Then the cart came into the field of Joshua of Beth Shemesh, and stood there; a large stone *was* there. So they split the wood of the cart and offered the cows as a burnt offering to the Lord.

A proper burnt offering to the Lord was supposed to be a male. However, these cows were offered, having carried the ark of God. The cart and the cows could never be used for anything else after having transported the ark. Being in a city of the Levites, priests could offer these sacrifices.

15 The Levites took down the ark of the Lord and the chest that *was* with it, in which *were* the articles of gold, and put *them* on the large stone. Then the men of Beth Shemesh offered burnt offerings and made sacrifices the same day to the Lord. **16** So when the five lords of the Philistines had seen *it*, they returned to Ekron the same day.

17 These *are* the golden tumors which the Philistines returned *as* a trespass offering to the Lord: one for Ashdod, one for Gaza, one for Ashkelon, one for Gath, one for Ekron; **18** and the golden rats, *according to* the number of all the cities of the Philistines *belonging to* the five lords, *both* fortified cities and country villages, even as far as the large *stone of* Abel on which they set the ark of the Lord, *which stone remains* to this day in the field of Joshua of Beth Shemesh.

The Philistines were successful in returning the ark, and those that had followed it to see what would happen went back home. Although they had seen the

power of God displayed in the actions of the cows pulling the cart and in the plagues, they did not turn to the God of Israel but went back home to Dagon.

1 Samuel 6:19 (NLT) But the Lord killed seventy men from Beth-shemesh because they looked into the Ark of the Lord. And the people mourned greatly because of what the Lord had done.

The people of Beth-shemesh treated the ark of God with disrespect. This was a city of Levites and priests of God! They should have immediately covered the ark with the proper cloths. They should have forbidden the people to lift the lid and look into it. They should have put the ark in a room all by itself, not left it out in the open on a rock for anyone to see. If priests looked into the ark, they should have known better, and they should have led the people rightly. Perhaps they thought this was their chance to look in the ark which had been hidden in the Tabernacle. Many people have been ruined by pursuing that which is forbidden. Remember Eve?

When the ark led the children of Israel across Jordan or on their travels, it traveled almost a third of a mile ahead of them. They were supposed to keep their distance from it, but here they were opening the lid and looking inside.

God got His message across to the Philistines - you don't put the ark of God in the temple with Dagon. God said, "*Thou shalt have no other gods before me.*" Now, He is getting his message across to His own people. There is a certain way to handle the ark of God (which was the seat of the presence of God). For that time period, the ark was to be hidden away in the Tabernacle, with staves through the rings. Only the High Priest could approach the ark - and only one time per year on the Day of Atonement. The ark was to be respected and approached according to the requirements given in the Law of Moses.

God allowed the pagan Philistines to transport the ark the way they did because they didn't know any better - and it suited His purpose of returning it to Israel. But God was not going to allow His people to treat it so commonly by lifting its lid and looking inside.

The Ark at Kirjath Jearim

20 "Who is able to stand in the presence of the Lord, this holy God?" they cried out. "Where can we send the Ark from here?"

21 So they sent messengers to the people at Kiriath-jearim and told them, "The Philistines have returned the Ark of the Lord. Come here and get it!"

When the Philistines began to have trouble from mishandling the ark, they wanted to pass it on to the next city. The people of Ashdod sent it to Gath, and then the people of Gath sent it to Ekron. Likewise, when trouble came to the people of Beth Shemesh from mishandling the ark, they wanted to pass it on to the next city. They went from one extreme to the other, first presumptuously looking into the ark, then wanting to get rid of it entirely.

Kirjath Jearim was on the way to Shiloh. They must have presumed that the ark would go back to Shiloh. However, this was not God's plan. Shiloh would no longer be the dwelling place of the tabernacle and the ark.

1 Samuel Chapter 7

1 Samuel 7:1 (NKJV) Then the men of Kirjath Jearim came and took the ark of the Lord, and brought it into the house of Abinadab on the hill, and consecrated Eleazar his son to keep the ark of the Lord.

The ark would stay in this place for several decades until King David would bring it to its new home in Jerusalem (2 Samuel 6). David would have his own troubles transporting the ark.

The men of Kirjath Jearim were very willing to take the ark and care for it. They must have transported it properly, because we do not read that they had any trouble. Abinadab must have been a Levite.

Samuel Judges Israel

2 So it was that the ark remained in Kirjath Jearim a long time; it was there twenty years. And all the house of Israel lamented after the Lord.

The ark was in Kirjath Jearim for twenty years. During this period of time Samuel was working, trying to bring about a turn in Israel. The ark could not go back to Shiloh - God had judged the idolatry of the people and the profane behavior of the priests, and Shiloh would no longer be the center of worship and the location of the tabernacle. The privilege was forfeited in Shiloh - they didn't possess the spiritual qualifications to guard Israel's glory.

Now we are entering a period of time when God allows a different way of doing things - at least temporarily - until the tabernacle can be set up in a new place. At this time there is no full worship of God at the tabernacle. Instead, we find Samuel at work among the people. Samuel is a Levite, but not a priest. Yet, we will read in the chapters ahead that Samuel is God's man to offer sacrifices for Israel until the priesthood and the tabernacle can be restored. It is a different time in Israel!

And all the house of Israel lamented after the Lord.

It took twenty years, but it was happening! Israel was ready to repent!

There are two main parts of repentance - sorrow for sin, and returning to God (changing direction).

3 Then Samuel spoke to all the house of Israel, saying, "If you return to the Lord with all your hearts, then put away the foreign gods and the Ashtoreths from among you, and prepare your hearts for the Lord, and serve Him only; and He will deliver you from the hand of the Philistines."

The Israelites didn't like being under the control of the Philistines. Yet, the fact that the Philistines controlled them was directly related to the fact that they worshiped pagan gods. So, Samuel admonished them to get rid of the idol gods, and then God would deliver them from the Philistines. They needed to repent - turn, change direction, return to the Lord God of Israel.

There would be no chance of restoring the tabernacle service until Israel returned to her God.

4 So the children of Israel put away the Baals and the Ashtoreths, and served the Lord only.

The worship of Baal and Ashtoreth was accompanied with lewd behavior. Not only was Israel guilty of idol worship, but in that idol worship, Israel was guilty of immorality and lewdness. Israel had much to repent over. But repent they did!

This was no small thing! This was an act of rebellion against the Philistines who ruled over them. But by repenting and turning toward Israel's God, Israel was asking for trouble with the Philistines. They weren't going to like it. The Philistines were in control, and when they rule, those under them worship their gods. Israel's repentance was really a declaration of war against those who had ruled over them for so long. Israel was asserting its spiritual and national independence.

5 And Samuel said, "Gather all Israel to Mizpah, and I will pray to the Lord for you." **6** So they gathered together at Mizpah, drew water, and poured it out before the Lord. And they fasted that day, and said there, "We have sinned against the Lord."

Mizpah means "a watch tower." It was a place on a hill where Israel had a good view of the enemy. Pouring water out before the Lord was a sign of repentance and contrition. It can also signify weakness - that Israel was powerless against the Philistines and needed God's help desperately.

Psalms 22:14 I am poured out like water,
And all My bones are out of joint;
My heart is like wax;
It has melted within Me.

In repentance the people of Israel poured out water and poured out their hearts to the Lord. It had taken twenty years. Samuel had been working behind the scenes to bring Israel to this point. Samuel was a man of prayer and a man of integrity. He had to be a man of patience, too.

And Samuel judged the children of Israel at Mizpah.

Now it is acknowledged that Samuel is a judge in Israel. He would be the last judge, for during his lifetime Israel would enter the era of the monarchy and have kings to rule over them. But for now, Samuel would become the civil and military ruler as well as continue to be a prophet to the people. He would add to this the duties of a priest in offering sacrifices. These were special times in Israel!

1 Samuel 7:7 Now when the Philistines heard that the children of Israel had gathered together at Mizpah, the lords of the Philistines went up against Israel. And when the children of Israel heard of it, they were afraid of the Philistines. **8** So the children of Israel said to Samuel, "Do not cease to cry out to the Lord our God for us, that He may save us from the hand of the Philistines."

When people move toward God, the devil doesn't like it. Repentance brings about a new order in a person's life. We shouldn't be too surprised when we have trouble after we obey God. The enemy of our soul doesn't want to lose control.

Backslidden Israel was returning to God, and the Philistines endeavored to retain mastery over them. Just as Pharaoh of old would not let the people go, the Philistines would not let them restore their faith in Jehovah God without a fight.

9 And Samuel took a suckling lamb and offered *it as a whole burnt offering to the Lord*. Then Samuel cried out to the Lord for Israel, and the Lord answered him.

The burnt offering was one of the five offerings described in Leviticus chapters 1 - 5. The burnt offering speaks to the redeemed of the Lord that they should give themselves wholly to God. The burnt offering is sometimes called a “whole burnt offering” (see Psalm 51:19, and Mark 12:33). The reason the word “whole” is added is because the whole animal is burned on the altar (for other offerings, only a part is burned on the altar). Perhaps the term “whole burnt offering” best illustrates its meaning. *The burnt offering speaks of total devotion and surrender to God.*

The burnt offering was a male of the herd (a bull) or of the flock (a sheep or a goat). It was to be without blemish, and it was to be given with a freewill. All of the sacrifice was burned on the altar. Poor people could offer a turtledove or pigeon as a burnt offering.

As a type or picture of Christian commitment, this offering speaks of total surrender to God, since the sacrifice was totally consumed. All of the offering was burned, the smoke ascending heavenward as “a sweet savor” to God (or “a pleasing aroma” to God).

1 Samuel 7:10 Now as Samuel was offering up the burnt offering, the Philistines drew near to battle against Israel. But the Lord thundered with a loud thunder upon the Philistines that day, and so confused them that they were overcome before Israel. **11** And the men of Israel went out of Mizpah and pursued the Philistines, and drove them back as far as below Beth Car.

While the lamb was burning on the altar, the Philistines appeared, ready for battle. The Israelites were up on the hill of Mizpah, and they could see them coming. But now the Lord speaks - with a voice of thunder!

1 Samuel 2:10 (Hannah’s prayer) Those who fight against the Lord will be shattered. He thunders against them from heaven;
the Lord judges throughout the earth.

Psalm 29:3 The voice of the Lord echoes above the sea.
The God of glory thunders.
The Lord thunders over the mighty sea.

4 The voice of the Lord is powerful;
the voice of the Lord is majestic . . .

7 The voice of the Lord strikes
with bolts of lightning.

The thunder was, as it were, God’s voice in answer to Samuel’s prayer. The Philistines were so confused by it that Israel was able to defeat them.

1 Samuel 7:12 Then Samuel took a stone and set *it up* between Mizpah and Shen, and called its name Ebenezer, saying, “Thus far the Lord has helped us.”

Ebenezer means “stone of help.” Setting up a memorial stone was one of the earliest methods of recording important events. These memorials were a single block of stone or a heap of stones. See Genesis 28:18-19 for an example.

An old hymn written in the 1700's speaks of Ebenezer - *Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing*. Here are two verses:

Come Thou fount of every blessing,
Tune my heart to sing Thy grace,
Streams of mercy never ceasing,
Call for songs of loudest praise.

Here I raise my Ebenezer,
Here by Thy great help I've come,
And I hope by Thy good pleasure,
Safely to arrive at home.

1 Samuel 7:13 So the Philistines were subdued, and they did not come anymore into the territory of Israel. And the hand of the Lord was against the Philistines all the days of Samuel. **14** Then the cities which the Philistines had taken from Israel were restored to Israel, from Ekron to Gath; and Israel recovered its territory from the hands of the Philistines. Also there was peace between Israel and the Amorites.

The power of the enemy was broken. Lost territory was restored. Notice that Israel's repentance and consecration to God brought victory over the Philistines *and* peace with the Amorites as well. *When a man's ways please the Lord he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him* (Proverbs 16:7).

This battle also brought a new order to Israel. Israel would grow in strength and prosperity. The period of the judges with its spiritual ups and downs was coming to a close. Israel would eventually be the head and not the tail.

15 And Samuel judged Israel all the days of his life. **16** He went from year to year on a circuit to Bethel, Gilgal, and Mizpah, and judged Israel in all those places. **17** But he always returned to Ramah, for his home was there. There he judged Israel, and there he built an altar to the Lord.

A person's life is a continual warfare against temptation and sin. There is no escaping this battle. If a person does not fight this battle, he will be taken captive or slain by sin. We must be ever vigilant and keep a guard upon our hearts and minds. Choosing to fight the battle will bring peace and victory.