

A Study of I Samuel

The Desiring for a King

Chapters Five – Seven

The Ark of God in the Hands of the Enemies

The traveling of the Ark of God among the Philistines is what encompasses chapters 5 through 7. The Ark of God will prove to be a “hot potato” for the enemies of Israel until it reaches a resting place at Kirjathjearim in the house of Eleazar the son of Abinadab (for more details see Appendix One, The Ark of God).

The Ark before Ashdod (5:1- 7): There are 5 lords of the Philistines represented by the 5 cities: Ashdod, Gaza, Askelon, Gath, Ekron (see. I Sam. 1:6-17). The Ark is recorded going to only 3 out of the 5 cities. However, when the Philistines give a trespass offering to appease the LORD, they give 5 offerings, representing the 5 lords. Therefore, it could be the Ark traveled to all 5 cities though not recorded.

The Ark would be a great spoil of war, so the desire to have such an item would be great. The Ark is first placed in the house of Dagon, in Ashdod.

Dagon is the fish god of the Philistines. It is believed to have the upper part of a woman and the lower part of the tail of a fish, much like the Mermaid (mermen).

The placing of the Ark of the Covenant in the house of Dagon ended in tragedy for the god of Dagon. **First**, the people of Ashdod upon arising in the morning find their fish god face down on the earth before the Ark of God (3). Interesting to note that Dagon is “face down” before the Ark of God, this is the “every knee shall bow” concept. Following this the Philistines place Dagon back only to find the next morning the fish god once again face down before the Ark. Only this time he was only a stump for the palms of his hands were cut off (4). It would seem that possibly the people of Ashdod secured their deity in place by the palms of his hands only to have them cut off and bowing before the Ark of God (speculative on my part, but worth contemplating).

The events surrounding their god where so disturbing that the people of Ashdod nor the priests of Ashdod “tread on the threshold of Dagon in Ashdod unto this day” (5).

The toppling of Dagon was only one part of the judgment against the Philistines, for the people of Ashdod where afflicted of the LORD, destroying them, and smiting them with emerods (6-7). The LORD it seems used mice to spread the plague throughout Ashdod and the surrounding coasts. Though mice are not mentioned in the account

they are connected to the affliction the Philistines encountered for I Samuel 6:4 says, “for one plague was on you all, and on your lords”. Also, the Philistines trespass offering consisted of golden emerods and golden mice, (I Sam. 6:4, 18).

The Ark before Gath (5:8-9): The hand of the LORD being heavy upon the people of Ashdod and the coasts round about, the lords decide to send the Ark to the city and people of Gath (5:8).

The city of Gath suffered greatly under the mighty hand of the LORD, bringing a “very great destruction” upon the people, for they had emerods in their secret parts (9).

The Ark before Ekron (5:10-12): The last city mentioned in the biblical account is the city of Ekron. It is here that the people “cry out, saying, They have brought about the ark of the God of Israel to us, to slay us and our people” (10) “for there was a deadly destruction throughout all the city; the hand of God was very heavy there” (11); “for the men that died not were smitten with the emerods” (12).

This very great and deadly destruction leads the people to seek the Ark to return from where it came from, basically send it back to the people of Israel (11).

The Ark at Bethshemesh (6:1-20): The total time that the Ark of Israel was in the land of the Philistines was 7 months. The people of Ekron assembled the lords of the Philistines and council the people to send the Ark of God away to its own place (5:11). The Philistines consult the priests and the diviners as to how they should send the ark and to where should they send it (2).

The Ark in preparation: As to how to send the ark, it was to be sent with a trespass offering of 5 golden emerods and 5 golden mice according to the number of the lords of the Philistines (4-5). The trespass offering was to ensure that no further destruction happens to them (5-6). The trespass offering was then put in a coffer and placed next to the ark on a new cart. The new cart was to be pulled by two milch kine (milking cows). The cows were to be tied to the cart having no direction but from God. To ensure the cows were lead of God the calves were removed. If the cows went aside to seek their caves, which would be natural, then God was not leading them. However, if they went the way of Bethshemesh it would be evident the God was leading them (3-9).

The Ark and the Hand of God: The cart with the ark and the trespass offering went “straight way to the way of Bathshemesh” guided by the hand of God (11-12). The cart having come into the field of Joshua is received by the Levites who take the ark and the offering. They place the ark on the great stone of Abel. Then the Levites broke up the cart to fuel the fire for a sacrifice unto the Lord (13-18).

The Curse of Curiosity (19-21):

The saying goes, “curiosity killed the cat” and so it is with the men of Bethshemesh. The holiness of God is a serious matter regardless of the people who trifle with it. God will not allow His holiness to be corrupted in any way, wither it be by the sons of Eli, the Philistines, or the Israelites of Bethshemesh. The men of Berthshemesh in unwarranted curiosity looked into the Ark, bring the judgment of God, God smiting of the people 50,070 men. It is because of this judgement that they seek the people of Kirjathjearim to take the Ark.

The Ark at Kirjathjearim (7:1-2): The Ark is brought up to Kirjathjearim to the house of Abinadab under the care of Eleazar the priest. The Ark resided at Kirjathjearim for 20 years. In the Biblical narrative, at the beginning of his reign over the United Monarchy, King David removed the Ark from Kirjath-jearim amid great rejoicing. On the way to Zion, Uzzah, one of the drivers of the cart that carried the Ark, put out his hand to steady the Ark, and was struck dead by God for touching it. David, in fear, carried the Ark aside into the house of Obed-edom the Gittite, instead of carrying it on to Zion, and it stayed there for three months. On hearing that God had blessed Obed-edom because of the presence of the Ark in his house, David had the Ark brought to Zion. In Zion, David put the Ark in the tent he had prepared for it, offered sacrifices, distributed food, and blessed the people and his own household.

The Supplication and Sacrifice at Mizpeh (7:3-12): Samuel calls on the nation to return unto the LORD, to put away their strange gods from among them (3-4). Samuel then gathers all Israel to Mizpeh¹ for a prayer meeting and sacrifice to the LORD (5-6). Israel having put away their gods (Ashtaroath and Baalim), prayed, sacrificed, and fasted unto

¹ Mizpeh was the meeting place on several other occasions: When the elders of the tribes gathered there to decide Benjamin’s fate following the murder of a Levite concubine (Judges 19:1-20; 20:1, 3, 21:1, 5, 8). Also when Saul was presented to Israel as king (I Sam. 10:17). And it was also the capital of Judah after the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians (2 Kings 25:23, 25).

the LORD only to have the Philistines come against them at Mizpeh (7). Israel asks Samuel to “cease not to cry unto the LORD our God for us that He will save us out of the hand of the Philistines.” (8) Samuel cries unto the LORD and the LORD heard him, and delivered Israel with a great victory (9-11).

Following this great victory Samuel sets up a great stone between Mizpeh and Shen calling it Ebenezer, meaning “Stone of Help” (12).

The Subduing of the Philistines (7:13-17): After the battle at Mizpeh the people were content to follow after Samuel for some 30 years. Samuel had a ministry as a prophet and judge, traveling from city to city ministering to the people and settling their disputes. Samuel was the last judge over Israel he was also the first of the national prophets and he functioned as priest.

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Chapter 8

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Samuel's Crooked Sons (1-3): Samuel's sons had been serving as judges at Beersheba in Judah. However, Samuel's sons were corrupt, walking not in the ways of the LORD but turned aside after lucre, taking bribes and perverting judgments (3). This reminds us of the sons of Eli who corrupted the office of priest (2:12, 22).

The Desire for a King (4-9): The age of Samuel and the wickedness of his son's lead the people to desire a king to judge them. The decision of the people displeased Samuel, seemingly because he perceived the people are rejecting him as their judge, however the LORD assures Samuel that the people are rejecting Him and not Samuel (6-7). God was their king (I Sam. 12:12).

Since the fall of man, mankind has been rejecting God, they do this by rejecting His way, His laws and His worship (8). This rejection is voiced in Psalm 2 (Luke 19:13-15) a prophetic passage in which all the nations under the antichrist will reject the Lord's anointed. Psalm 2 is also quoted at the rejection of the nation of Israel in Acts 4:25, 26.

Samuel is told to protest to them solemnly, telling them what manner of person will reign over them (9).

The Manner of the King (10-22): A monarch is the LORD's form of government. However, the problem with all earthly rulers is if the rulers are ungodly so are the people. The saying is, "so goes the leadership so goes the people". Thus, a monarchy demands a righteous leader. This is why God places safeguards in His law to ensure the king walks justly. The kings of Israel were to write a copy of the law of the Lord and read it daily (Deut. 17:18-20). Another rule was that the rulers were not to take bribes (Deut. 16:18-20 cf. I Sam. 12:2-5). These and many more are laid out in the Law. However, while even David was a man after God's own heart all mankind fall grievously short. Thus, God will set His King upon His holly hill, to rule mankind in righteousness (look these passages up: Psalm 2:6; Psalm 3:4; Psalm 15:1-5; Psalm 24:3-4).

The manner of king the king that will rule Israel is spelled out very clearly in these verses. The repeated phrase, "he will take" sums it up. However, the sad reality is that the people will gladly allow the "taking" as long as they do not have to "fight battles". The idea is any form of slavery is acceptable as long the people do not die. The ease of servitude to the cost of freedom is the cry of the people, Egypt instead of the responsibility that comes with the wilderness (Num. 11:5-6).