

# 1 Samuel 06 - The Philistines Return the Ark to Israel

## II. The Ark's travels (4:1b—7:17)

(3) God supernaturally guides the Ark back to Israel (6:1—7:2)

(A) Philistines strategize a magical return to Israel (6:1-9)

(B) God supernaturally guides the ark to Beth-Shemesh (6:10-18)

(C) God supernaturally manifests himself through the ark to the inhabitants of Bethshemesh (6:19-20)

(D) Ark returns to Kiriath-jearim (6:21—7:2)

## 1 Samuel 6

(3) God supernaturally guides the Ark back to Israel (6:1—7:2)

(A) Philistines strategize a magical return to Israel (6:1-9)

1 Now the ark of the LORD had been in the territory of the Philistines for seven months.

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1 The Ark of the LORD remained in Philistine territory for seven months.

1 And the ark of the LORD was in the country of the Philistines seven months.

- After seven months, the Philistines learned what the Israelites had not: Yahweh is a sovereign God

- The Philistines decided to return the Ark to Israel, but nobody had the courage to undertake the task

2 And the Philistines called for the priests and the diviners, saying, "What are we to do with the ark of the LORD? Tell us how we may send it to its place."

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 shall send it to its place."

2 The Philistines summoned the priests and diviners and asked, "What should we do about the Ark of the LORD? Tell us how we should send it back to its place."

2 And the Philistines called for the priests and the diviners, saying, "What shall we do to the ark of the LORD? tell us wherewith we shall send it to his place."

3 And they said, "If you are going to send the ark of the God of Israel away, do not send it empty; but you shall certainly return to Him a guilt offering. Then you will be healed, and it will be revealed to you why His hand does not leave you."

3 They said, "If you send away the ark of the God of Israel, do not send it empty; but you shall surely return to Him a guilt offering. Then you will be healed and it will be known to you why His hand is not removed from you."

3 They said, "If you send the Ark of the God of Israel back, don't send it empty, but rather be sure to send back to him a guilt offering. Then you will be healed and will know why his oppression has not been removed from you."

**3** And they said, If ye send away the ark of the God of Israel, send it not empty; but in any wise return him a trespass offering: then ye shall be healed, and it shall be known to you why his hand is not removed from you.

- This was good advice from the Philistine priests, but may have been an attempt to manipulate God

— The trespass (guilt) offerings were to compensate God for the Philistines capturing the Ark

4 Then they said, "What is to be the guilt offering that we shall return to Him?" And they said, "Five gold tumors and five gold mice *corresponding to* the number of the governors of the Philistines, since one plague was on all of you and on your governors.

4 Then they said, "What shall be the guilt offering which we shall return to Him?" And they said, "Five golden tumors and five golden mice *according to* the number of the lords of the Philistines, for one plague was on all of you and on your lords.

4 They asked, "What is the guilt offering that we should send back to him?"

"Five gold tumors and five gold mice," they answered, "according to the number of the lords of the Philistines, since the same plague was on all of you and on your lords.

**4** Then said they, What shall be the trespass offering which we shall return to him? They answered, Five golden emerods, and five golden mice, according to the number of the lords of the Philistines: for one plague was on you all, and on your lords.

- Evidently the reason the Philistines created golden images of mice was that there was a connection between the rodent and the swellings that the Philistines suffered

— This has led many to speculate that God struck the Philistines with bubonic plague, which is transmitted by the fleas that live on rodents

— By sending the golden rodents out of their country, the Philistines were hoping the living ones would depart as well

5 So you shall make likenesses of your tumors and likenesses of your mice that are ruining the land, and **you shall give glory to the God of Israel**; perhaps He will lighten His hand from you, your gods, and your land.

5 So you shall make likenesses of your tumors and likenesses of your mice that ravage the land, and you shall give glory to the God of Israel; perhaps He will ease His hand from you,

your gods, and your land.

5 Make images of your tumors and images of the mice that are destroying your land, and you are to give glory to the God of Israel. Perhaps he will remove his pressure from you, your gods, and your land.

5 Wherefore ye shall make images of your emerods, and images of your mice that mar the land; and ye shall give glory unto the God of Israel: peradventure he will lighten his hand from off you, and from off your gods, and from off your land.

- The mice (rats) I can visualize; but I can't help but wonder who served as a model for the images of the hemorrhoids?

- "...you shall give glory to the God of Israel" - here's the key point, which the Israelites missed that started this whole mess

6 Why then do you harden your hearts as the Egyptians and Pharaoh hardened their hearts? When He had severely dealt with them, did they not let the people go, and they left?

6 Why then do you harden your hearts as the Egyptians and Pharaoh hardened their hearts? When He had severely dealt with them, did they not allow the people to go, and they departed?

6 Why should you harden your hearts just as the Egyptians and Pharaoh hardened their hearts? Isn't it true that after God toyed with them, they let Israel go, and off they went?

6 Wherefore then do ye harden your hearts, as the Egyptians and Pharaoh hardened their hearts? when he had wrought wonderfully among them, did they not let the people go, and they departed?

- The Philistine priests knew of God's actions in Egypt on behalf of the Israelites, and actually counseled the Philistine people to not harden their hearts as Pharaoh had done

7 Now then, take and prepare a new cart and two milk cows on which there **has never been a yoke**; and hitch the cows to the cart and take their calves back home, away from them.

7 Now therefore, take and prepare a new cart and two milch cows on which there has never been a yoke; and hitch the cows to the cart and take their calves home, away from them.

7 "So make a new cart, and take two milk cows that have never had a yoke on them. Hitch the cows to the cart and take their calves away from them and back to the house.

7 Now therefore make a new cart, and take two milch kine, on which there hath come no yoke, and tie the kine to the cart, and bring their calves home from them:

- "...has never been a yoke" - unbroken cows; these were "wild" cows

- In 1 Chr 13, David and the Israelites used a cart when retrieving the Ark from Kirjath-jearim

8 Then take the ark of the LORD and place it on the cart; and put the articles of gold which you return to Him as a guilt offering in a saddlebag by its side. Then send it away that it may go.

8 Take the ark of the LORD and place it on the cart; and put the articles of gold which you return to Him as a guilt offering in a box by its side. Then send it away that it may go.

8 Take the Ark of the LORD, put it on the cart, and put the gold objects that you are returning to him as a guilt offering in a box beside it. Then send it away and let it go.

8 And take the ark of the LORD, and lay it upon the cart; and put the jewels of gold, which ye return him for a trespass offering, in a coffer by the side thereof; and send it away, that it may go.

- Surprising they weren't killed for touching the Ark...but they weren't in a covenant relationship with God

9 But watch: if it goes up by the way of its own territory to **Beth-shemesh**, then He has done this great evil to us. But if not, then we will know that it was not His hand that struck us; it happened to us by chance."

9 Watch, if it goes up by the way of its own territory to Beth-shemesh, then He has done us this great evil. But if not, then we will know that it was not His hand that struck us; it happened to us by chance."

9 Keep watching it. If it goes up along the road to its own territory to Beth-shemesh, it's the LORD who has done this great evil to us. But if it does not, then we will know that he wasn't pressuring us. It happened to us as a natural event."

9 And see, if it goeth up by the way of his own coast to Bethshemesh, then he hath done us this great evil: but if not, then we shall know that it is not his hand that smote us: it was a chance that happened to us.

- The Philistines devised a test to determine whether the Lord or chance had caused the destruction that afflicted their cities

— They sent the Ark and the gifts of gold back to Israel on a cart pulled by two cows that had never been yoked

— After removing the cow's calves, the Philistines released the cart to go in any direction the cows chose; their instinct would be to go toward their calves

— The Philistine priests reasoned that if the Lord caused their afflictions, He would supernaturally direct the cart back toward Israel; that is exactly what happened

- "...Beth-shemesh" - "house of the sun"; a Levitical city, which God set apart to serve Him in His tabernacle (Joshua 21:16); it was the closest Israelite town to Ekron

(B) God supernaturally guides the ark to Beth-Shemesh (6:10-18)

**10** Then the men did so: they took two milk cows and hitched them to the cart, and shut in their calves at home.

**10** Then the men did so, and took two milch cows and hitched them to the cart, and shut up their calves at home.

**10** The men did this. They took two milk cows, hitched them to the cart, and penned up their calves in the house.

**10** And the men did so; and took two milch kine, and tied them to the cart, and shut up their calves at home:

**11** And they put the ark of the LORD on the cart, and the saddlebag with the gold mice and the likenesses of their tumors.

**11** They put the ark of the LORD on the cart, and the box with the golden mice and the likenesses of their tumors.

**11** They put the Ark of the LORD, the box, the gold mice, and the images of their tumors on the cart.

**11** And they laid the ark of the LORD upon the cart, and the coffer with the mice of gold and the images of their emerods.

**12** Now the cows went straight in the direction of Beth-shemesh; they went on the same road, bellowing as they went, and did not turn off to the right or to the left. And the governors of the Philistines followed them to the border of Beth-shemesh.

**12** And the cows took the straight way in the direction of Beth-shemesh; they went along the highway, lowing as they went, and did not turn aside to the right or to the left. And the lords of the Philistines followed them to the border of Beth-shemesh.

**12** The cows took a straight path along the road to Beth-shemesh. They stayed on the highway, lowing as they went, and did not turn to the right or the left. The Philistine lords followed them as far as the border of Beth-shemesh.

**12** And the kine took the straight way to the way of Bethshemesh, and went along the highway, lowing as they went, and turned not aside to the right hand or to the left; and the lords of the Philistines went after them unto the border of Bethshemesh.

- The cows hitched to the cart carrying the Ark and guilt offerings went against their natural instinct by leaving their calfs at home

— This was convincing proof to the Philistines that their troubles had been caused by God

— God directed the cows and they brought the cart to the field of Joshua, an inhabitant of Beth-shemesh. The Israelites in the harvest field rejoiced to see the Ark returned.

**13** Now *the people of Beth-shemesh* were gathering in their wheat harvest in the valley, and they raised their eyes and saw the ark, and rejoiced at seeing *it*.

**13** Now *the people of Beth-shemesh* were reaping their wheat harvest in the valley, and they raised their eyes and saw the ark and were glad to see *it*.

**13** Now the people of Beth-shemesh were gathering their wheat harvest in the valley. They looked up, saw the Ark, and rejoiced to see it.

**13** And they of Bethshemesh were reaping their wheat harvest in the valley: and they lifted up their eyes, and saw the ark, and rejoiced to see it.

- Even though the Ark had been absent from Israel for seven months, the Lord did not remove His blessing of fertile crops from the Israelites during that time

— This shows God's grace

**14** And the cart came into the field of Joshua the Beth-shemite and stopped there where there was a large stone; and they split the wood of the cart and offered the cows as a burnt offering to the LORD.

**14** The cart came into the field of Joshua the Beth-shemite and stood there where there was a large stone; and they split the wood of the cart and offered the cows as a burnt offering to the LORD.

**14** The cart came to the field of Joshua of Beth-shemesh, and stopped there. In that place there was a large stone. They broke up the wood from the cart, and offered up the cows as a burnt offering to the LORD.

**14** And the cart came into the field of Joshua, a Bethshemite, and stood there, where there was a great stone: and they clave the wood of the cart, and offered the kine a burnt offering unto the LORD.

- They re-purposed the wood from the cart, and used the two cows for a burnt offering

**15** And the Levites took down the ark of the LORD and the saddlebag that was with it, in which were the articles of gold, and put them on the large stone; and the men of Beth-shemesh offered burnt offerings and sacrificed sacrifices that day to the LORD.

**15** The Levites took down the ark of the LORD and the box that was with it, in which were the articles of gold, and put them on the large stone; and the men of Beth-shemesh offered burnt offerings and sacrificed sacrifices that day to the LORD.

**15** The descendants of Levi took down the Ark of the LORD, along with the box that was with it, containing the objects of gold, and they put them on the large stone. The men of Beth-shemesh offered burnt offerings and made sacrifices to the LORD that day.

**15** And the Levites took down the ark of the LORD, and the coffer that was with it, wherein the jewels of gold were, and put them on the great stone: and the men of Bethshemesh offered burnt offerings and sacrificed sacrifices the same day unto the LORD.

16 When the five governors of the Philistines saw *it*, they returned to Ekron that day.  
16 When the five lords of the Philistines saw it, they returned to Ekron that day.  
16 When the five Philistine lords saw this, they returned to Ekron that very day.  
16 And when the five lords of the Philistines had seen it, they returned to Ekron the same day.

**17** Now these are the gold tumors which the Philistines returned as a guilt offering to the LORD: one for Ashdod, one for Gaza, one for Ashkelon, one for Gath, *and* one for Ekron;

**17** These are the golden tumors which the Philistines returned for a guilt offering to the LORD: one for Ashdod, one for Gaza, one for Ashkelon, one for Gath, one for Ekron;

**17** These are the gold tumors that the Philistines returned as a guilt offering to the LORD: one for Ashdod, one for Gaza, one for Ashkelon, one for Gath, and one for Ekron.

**17** And these are the golden emerods which the Philistines returned for a trespass offering unto the LORD; for Ashdod one, for Gaza one, for Askelon one, for Gath one, for Ekron one;

- Did the Israelites figure out what the golden emerods were?

18 and the gold mice, *corresponding* to the number of all the cities of the Philistines belonging to the five governors, both of fortified cities and of country villages. The large stone on which they placed the ark of the LORD *is a witness* to this day in the field of Joshua the Beth-shemite.

18 and the golden mice, *according* to the number of all the cities of the Philistines belonging to the five lords, both of fortified cities and of country villages. The large stone on which they set the ark of the LORD *is a witness* to this day in the field of Joshua the Beth-shemite.

18 The gold mice represented the number of all the Philistine towns belonging to the five lords, both fortified towns and unwallled villages. The large stone, beside which they put the Ark of the LORD, is a witness to this day in the field of Joshua of Beth-shemesh.

18 And the golden mice, according to the number of all the cities of the Philistines belonging to the five lords, both of fenced cities, and of country villages, even unto the great stone of Abel, whereon they set down the ark of the LORD: which stone remaineth unto this day in the field of Joshua, the Bethshemite.

(C) God supernaturally manifests himself through the ark to the inhabitants of Bethshemesh (6:19-20)

**19** Now He fatally struck some of the men of Beth-shemesh because they had **looked into** the ark of the LORD. He struck 50,070 men among the people, and the people mourned because the LORD had struck the people with a great slaughter.

**19** He struck down some of the men of Beth-shemesh because they had looked into the ark of the LORD. He struck down of all the people, 50,070 men, and the people mourned because the LORD had struck the people with a great slaughter.

**19** God struck down the men of Beth-shemesh because they had looked into the Ark of the LORD. He struck down 50,070 men among the people, and the people mourned because the LORD struck down the people with a great slaughter.

**19** And he smote the men of Bethshemesh, because they had looked into the ark of the LORD, even he smote of the people fifty thousand and threescore and ten men: and the people lamented, because the LORD had smitten many of the people with a great slaughter.

- "...looked into" - it is not the fact that they looked into the Ark and saw something they shouldn't have seen that brought judgment; the point is that it was at the Ark, in the Holy of Holies in the Tabernacle, where God met with His people

— God is not meeting with His people now...they have turned from Him in disobedience

— The Mosaic Law specified that no one was to look into the Ark or that person would die (Num 4:5,20)

— This command about the treatment of the Ark was not given to the Philistines, so they weren't governed by it...it was given to the Israelites, so they were held accountable

— Greater access to knowledge brings greater accountability

- The 50,070 number has created a problem, as there were not 50,000 people in that little village

— In Hebrew, letters are used for numbers, and it is easy for a scribe to miscopy or misread a letter

— It is likely that 70 men were judged instantly, certainly a "great slaughter" for such a small village. Josephus concurs with the 70 total.

— The problem does not affect anything crucial. It is important that we know God did judge their sin. How many were slain is not a vital matter.

The lesson here is that the power of God was not something that Israel somehow tamed and confined in a box.

Why did God strike dead some Israelites who touched the Ark inappropriately (v19; 2 Sam 6:7; 1 Chr 13:10; Cf. Lev 10:2) and not deal with the Philistines in the same way (4:17)? God was merciful to the Philistines. He will be gracious to whom He will be gracious, and He will show compassion on whom He will show compassion (Ex 33:19). The reason for His patience with the Philistines was partially to teach the Israelites and the Philistines His omnipotence. Also, the Israelites' greater knowledge of God's will placed them under greater responsibility to do His will.

20 And the men of Beth-shemesh said, "Who is able to stand before the LORD, this holy God? **And to whom will He go up from us?"**

20 The men of Beth-shemesh said, "Who is able to stand before the LORD, this holy God? And to whom shall He go up from us?"

20 The men of Beth-shemesh asked themselves, "Who can stand in the presence of the LORD, this holy God? And to whom will the Ark go from here?"

**20** And the men of Bethshemesh said, Who is able to stand before this holy LORD God? and to whom shall he go up from us?

- The Israelites came to a fresh appreciation of Yahweh's holiness because these men died  
- "...And to whom will He go up from us?" - indicates that they wished God would depart from them because they were sinful and He was holy (Cf. Is 6:5; Luke 5:8)

(D) Ark returns to Kiriath-jearim (6:21—7:2)

21 So they sent messengers to the inhabitants of Kiriath-jearim, saying, "The Philistines have brought back the ark of the LORD; come down and take it up to yourselves."

21 So they sent messengers to the inhabitants of Kiriath-jearim, saying, "The Philistines have brought back the ark of the LORD; come down and take it up to you."

21 They sent messengers to the residents of Kiriath-jearim, who told them, "The Philistines have returned the Ark of the LORD. Come down and take it up with you."

21 And they sent messengers to the inhabitants of Kirjathjearim, saying, The Philistines have brought again the ark of the LORD; come ye down, and fetch it up to you.

- Hophni and Phinehas presumed in their own plans that they could win victories by trusting the Ark when their lives were wicked, and God killed them  
- Eli died because he had not disciplined his own sons who were dishonoring the Lord  
- The Philistines died because they treated Jehovah like one of their own gods  
- The men of Beth-shemesh died because they presumptuously looked into the Ark  
— Lesson: It does not pay to trifle with God

Why did the Israelites not return the ark to the tabernacle at Shiloh? One possibility is that the Philistines had destroyed Shiloh (Cf. Ps 78:60; Jer 7:12,14; 26:6,9). There is some archaeological evidence that the city was destroyed about 1050 BC. The ark did not reside in an appropriate place of honor until David brought it into his new capital, Jerusalem (2 Sam 6). Kiriath-jearim was not a Levitical city, nor is there any reason to believe that Abinadab (lit. "My Father is Noble") and Eleazar were priests or Levites. Perhaps the Israelites kept the ark there for convenience' sake. It evidently remained there for 20 years (Cf. 7:2).

## Summary

This three-chapter section of 1 Samuel records a painful lesson God taught to His people Israel, and through them teaches to us. Israel had failed to treat God with respect. Even Eli permitted his own sons to defile the priesthood. The people tried to manipulate God by bringing the Ark to the battlefield "so that it may go with us and save us from the hand of our enemies" (4:3). This basically pagan view of the Ark failed to sense that it was a symbol, pointing to God, but with no magical or divine power in itself.

Yet the Ark was associated with God. It had been set apart to God, and as such was a holy thing. The Philistines discovered that Israel's God was supreme when He judged them and their god for treating the Ark as a victory trophy. And when God's own people failed to show respect for the holy, they too were struck down. Why? Because Israel desperately needed to recover a sense of the holiness and the power of God. Only when the people of God honored Him again could He bring His people blessing.

### **Lessons**

(1) We don't trifle with God. God gave them rules regarding the Ark, and the Israelites (as a whole) and the Beth-shemites broke them. Later, David will get a painful lesson in this area (1 Chr 13).

(2) Their first mistake was that they presumed on their own plans, without seeking counsel from the Lord first. To compound that problem, the Israelites relied on a form of mysticism as a form of their justification. They put their hope in an artifact instead of the Living God. They did not appreciate the importance of obeying the Mosaic Law.

- When you have a plan or an idea, or an opportunity opens up, do you seek the Lord first? Do you look for His confirmation...in His Word, in Godly counselors? (Ps 1)
- Do we fall into the trap of looking at artifacts that have some type of imputed value or power?
- Do you remember that it's not our plans, but God's, that we should be seeking when we pray? Prayer should never be an opportunity to manipulate God into what we want Him to do for us. Prayer is God's way of enlisting us in what He wants to do. Our search should be in what He wants from us, not what we want from Him.

(3) God means what He says and says what He means. God takes Himself seriously, and we should as well.