

1st Samuel

Lesson 9

(b) The Offering to Accompany the Ark (6:3-6)

The priests and diviners had a concern. They proposed an offering to accompany the Ark as it was returned. Verse 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.’”*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.’*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.*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?”* (6:3-6)

Clearly, the Philistines knew the story of the Exodus and the hardness of the hearts of the Egyptians and Pharaoh. These ungodly priests and diviners were smart enough to put two and two together to determine that Philistia was in the same predicament with the true and living God as the Egyptians were centuries before. The offering would be five golden hemorrhoids and five golden mice as a tribute for all the Philistines that had been afflicted because the Ark had been taken from Israel. In so doing, the offering would give glory and honor to the true God of Israel when the Ark arrives back in its nation of rightful ownership.

At this point, we have to wonder how the Philistines carried the Ark. How did the Philistine men not die for touching the Ark. That probably has to do with how the Israelites packed the Ark for transport. If you will remember from our study in Exodus, when the Ark was moved from place to place, the Veil of the Tabernacle was taken down, folded, and draped over the Ark by the priests who had the authority from the LORD to do it. Then, the waterproof porpoise hides were draped over the Veil, and it was all secured with ropes. Two long poles were put through the rings that were attached at the bottom of the Ark. The Ark was carried by four priests who lifted it by the poles. The actual main part of the Ark was never touched. Everywhere the Ark traveled, it was covered and prepared in this way. When it was taken to the battlegrounds, it was always covered. No one actually saw the main body of the Ark outside of the Holy of Holies. How did the Philistines move the Ark to the temple of Dagon? The men used the poles to carry the Ark. If they had touched the main box of the Ark, they would have died instantly. More than likely, after the battle when the Ark was captured, it was taken to Ashdod still under its cover and immediately placed beside Dagon. Tired and worn out, the Philistines probably did not attempt to uncover the Ark that day. When they arrived the next day, found Dagon on his face, they probably did not try to uncover the Ark. More than likely, for seven months, the Ark remained covered since the priests packed it away back in Shiloh. It was there, still packed, in Ekron. No doubt, the offering was agreed to by the Philistines, and the craftsmen immediately began to craft the golden hemorrhoids and mice. But how would the Ark be physically returned to Israel?

(c) The Procedure to Return the Ark (6:7-8)

Our question is answered next with the procedure to return the Ark. Verse 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.”*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.”* (6:7-8)

The priests and diviners were smart enough to know that they did not want anyone to uncover and open the Ark; it would be deadly. Instead, the golden hemorrhoids and mice were placed in a box and sat beside the Ark on the new cart.

Notice how far the priest and diviners are willing to go to make sure it is the will of the God of Israel that the Ark be returned. The new cart would have indeed been fine to carry the Ark with no problems at all. But to hook that cart to two milch cows that had never been put under a yoke was a bold suggestion. Animals that have never been in a yoke have to be trained to accept the yoke. What a bold move! They might have expected the cows to act the same as all other cows would have performed being put under a yoke for the first time – wild. Then to take the calves away from these mother cows would have caused the cows to go insane virtually. These were *milch cows*, which meant *they were still giving milk to their calves*. Milching cows want to be milked by their calves until the milk dries up. If they are not milked, the pain becomes great on the mother cows until the pressure is released through milking or the milk dries up. These two factors would have been enough to thwart a successful return of the Ark to Israel unless it was God's will for it to happen.

(i) The Test to Determine the Philistine Fate (6:9)

This procedure was designed to be a test to determine the Philistine fate. Verse 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."* (6:9)

The short story here is simple. If the cows know where to go to take the Ark home, the God of Israel surely caused all the problems in Philistia. If the cows wander wildly, it was not the God of Israel Who caused the problems.

(ii) The Test Determined the Philistine Fate (6:10-12)

But what was the outcome? The test determined the Philistine fate. Verse 10. *"Then the men did so, and took two milch cows and hitched them to the cart, and shut up their calves at home."¹¹ They put the ark of the LORD on the cart, and the box with the golden mice and the likenesses of their tumors.¹² And the cows took the straightway 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."* (6:10-12)

Straightway, the cows were led by the LORD to take the Ark home. The Ark was the punishment of the Philistines. Beth-shemesh sets just inside the tribal area of Judah southeast of Ekron about four miles. The Philistines followed the cows as they marched and lowed all the way. They were on a divine mission from the LORD. What an honor for the cows.

(d) The Reception of the Return of the Ark (6:13)

As the Ark traveled on the cart over the Philistine border, Samuel speaks of the reception of the return of the Ark. Verse 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."* (6:13)

As the cows pulled the Ark along, the Israelites in the fields saw the miracle and were glad to see it. Let us move ahead quickly in this story to see the end. Samuel told the story very well.

(i) The Offering at the Stone Altar (6:14-16)

In Beth-shemesh, the cows stopped at a large stone. We will call this passage the offering at the stone altar. Verse 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."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.*

¹⁶*When the five lords of the Philistines saw it, they returned to Ekron that day."* (6:14-16)

Israel got its Ark back; the lords got their answer. The cows got their honor.

(ii) The Gifts at the Stone Altar (6:17-18)

Then we come to the gifts at the stone altar. Verse 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;”*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.”* (6:17-18)

Archeologists think they have found this stone in Beth-shemesh, but the truth as to it being the stone is still not known. Here in this verse, Samuel confirms that there were five lords, one for each of the major cities of Philistia.

(iii) The Punishment at the Stone Altar (6:19-21)

Now we come to the punishment at the stone altar, for the Israelites at Beth-shemesh were willing to do to the Ark what the Philistines were not willing to do. Uncover the Ark and look into it. Verse 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.”*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?”*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.”* (6:19-21)

Beth-shemesh knew that they were in peril. Fifty-thousand, seventy men looked into the Ark. Fifty-thousand, seventy men died for looking into the Ark. Beth-shemesh called for the leaders of Kiriath-jearim who came to get the ark out of their village. They wanted no part of it anymore. The joy with its presence brought great heartache and loss.

Chapter 7

(e) The Storage of the Ark (7:1-2)

Wanting to get rid of the Ark in Beth-shemesh, the storage of the Ark was taken on by the men of Kiriath-jearim. Chapter 1, verse 1. *“And the men of Kiriath-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.”*

² *From the day that the ark remained at Kiriath-jearim, the time was long, for it was twenty years; and all the house of Israel lamented after the LORD.”* (7:1-2)

We wish we knew more about this “house of Abinadab,” but the Word of God simply tells us nothing save to the entry in 1st Chronicles 13:7, which picks up the story twenty years later when David attempts to bring the Ark from this house to Jerusalem. The two passages together act as a time-maker for the time of this event. This becomes a problem in the chronology of Samuel’s story. David will not attempt to bring the Ark to Jerusalem until the seventh year of his reign when he captured the great Jebusite citadel and made it his capital, and moved there from Hebron. In this place in the storyline, Saul had not been crowned king yet. That will occur in the next chapter. Saul will have finished his forty years as king, and David will be in his seventh or eighth year as king when the twenty-year time is concluded. What does this mean? A few reminders will be helpful at this point. First, the style of Samuel’s writing has been that he will tell a story with all the pertinent facts. Then he will retell the story from a different position focusing on the pertinent facts with other characters. We saw Samuel do this repeatedly in the book of Judges, then the book of Ruth, which truly rested in the same timeline as the book of Judges. Now, in the book of First Samuel, Samuel recorded information that clearly sat in the same timeline as the book of Judges and Ruth. What does all that have to do with this passage? The answer brings us to the second point, the most important point. The capture of this Ark by the Philistines had to have happened when Samuel was very old and a little more than halfway into Saul’s reign. Why does Samuel not tie the two together? Why did he not put his own story in the book of Judges? The story of Saul in First Samuel is so

important that Samuel will save the details of Saul's life until later. It all makes sense. In addition, Saul will very much be a king in name only. He will not rule with the authority we often mentally impose and expect to be given to a king. He will base his capital at his home in the tribal area of Benjamin. He will call for warriors when necessary. He will spend most of his time chasing after David with the intent of killing him. He will struggle for years with his own mental condition. More than likely, these seven months of the Ark being in the hands of the Philistines had to have occurred before David killed Goliath. All those pieces fit together with the story when all the storylines are harmonized. David will probably kill Goliath when he is about the age of seventeen. He will become king thirteen years later at the age of thirty. At age thirty-seven, David will move the Ark to Jerusalem. Where does that put the story when we move backward twenty years? It takes us to the time of the death of Goliath or shortly before while Saul was king. However, at this point in First Samuel 7, the scene seems to be just a few weeks after the return of the Ark from its seven-month exile in Philistia. Put away the mention of the twenty-year stay of the Ark for now as we must keep our minds at the time of the return of the Ark. Samuel is writing long after these events have happened. He often makes summaries that we, in our western mindset, and the confusion that can come from the difficulty in an English translation from a Hebrew text, we can jump to incorrect conclusions. The time in this passage for the rest of the chapter remains at the time the Philistines returned the Ark.

In the passage, it says that Abinadab "*consecrated Eleazar his son to keep the ark of the LORD.*" Like Abinadab, we know nothing about this son named Eleazar except what we have here. We must not read too much into this passage about the word *consecrate*. We like to put holy and religious connotations on the word, but it is best to use it in this passage in the plain sense of the word. To *consecrate* simply means *to set aside to put in charge of something*. In this case, Eleazar was simply given the job of caring for the Ark in Abinadab's house. Further, there is no reason to assume that Abinadab or his son were Levites, nor is there a reason to assume that Abinadab's house was a temple or holy place of some sort. With the Ark there, it became a holy place, but that does not mean that it was a holy place before the arrival of the Ark. We simply do not have enough information in the Holy Scriptures to make any of those conclusions.

Finally, in this passage, the writer tells us that "*all the house of Israel lamented after the LORD.*" Sure they did. The Ark was not in the Tabernacle in Shiloh, where it should have never been removed. The Veil was folded across the Ark in its storage place in Kiriath-jearim where it could not properly be hung. The offerings before the LORD at the Tabernacle in Shiloh no longer had the same meaning or purpose. The faith of Israel and its required offerings were basically rendered null. No wonder the faithless nation of Israel lamented. It is strange but true. Those who ignore the purpose of important things lament when those important things are no longer available.

We must make a special note at the point in the book. Until chapter 7, verse 2, the writing of this book matches the style of Samuel's record in the book of Judges and Ruth. Beginning with verse 2 of this chapter, someone besides Samuel picked up the pen to record Samuel's story in this record. More than likely, it was the prophet Gadd. There are three clues that gives us this determination. First, from this point on, the writer will frequently use the words, "*Samuel said.*" In the first six chapters and the first verse of chapter 7, the words "*Samuel said*" were used only one time in chapter 3 verse 10, when Samuel was telling us about what the LORD said to him at his call as young boy. The second clue is found in the fact that to this point in the storyline, after telling us about how the LORD called him to be a judge, Samuel focused on the plight of Israel in particular details. He did not speak about King Saul or the future King David, although King Saul was king at the time and David had been anointed the next king by Samuel by the time of the stealing of the Ark debacle. The third clue is found in the fact that Samuel could not have recorded that "*From the day that the ark remained at Kiriath-jearim, the time was long, for it was twenty years.*" Samuel did not live long

enough to see the new King David move the Ark from Kiriath-jearim in his seventh year as king of Israel. Samuel will die following the event where David hides from King Saul in the cave and cuts the hem of his garment off and Saul repents from trying to kill him in chapter 24. Here in chapter 7, the next writer after Samuel picks up the pen and covers the stories of Samuel, Saul, Jonathan, and David, but not all in chronological order. Notice how in verse 3, the dialog between individuals, usually with Samuel increases exponentially, where before, it was spotty at best.

c) The Dispatch to Israel

(1) Samuel's Message (7:3-4)

With that said, the new writer picks up with what Samuel said when the Ark was returned. He deals with the lament of the nation of Israel about the events that had occurred with the Ark which gave Samuel the perfect opportunity to send a dispatch to Israel. We come to Samuel's message. Verse 3. *"Then Samuel spoke to all the house of Israel, saying, 'If you return to the LORD with all your heart, remove the foreign gods and the Ashteroth from among you and direct your hearts to the LORD and serve Him alone; and He will deliver you from the hand of the Philistines.'"*⁴ *So the sons of Israel removed the Baals and the Ashteroth and served the LORD alone."* (7:3-4)

Sometimes it takes a great loss to facilitate a great personal change. Such was the case in this passage. The people were in the perfect place in their lives to hear a message that they had basically ignored since the time of Joshua's death. The whole of Israel's problems during the time of the Judges was summed up here in Samuel's message. The people were ready to hear, "... *direct your hearts to the LORD and serve Him alone; and He will deliver you from the hand of the Philistines.*" They did.

(2) Samuel's Prayer (7:5-6)

Even though it will become evident with verse 3 that we have a new writer recording the life of Samuel, our outline continues from Samuel's message to Samuel's prayer.

Samuel's message was delivered, and now we come to Samuel's prayer. Verse 5. *"Then Samuel said, 'Gather all Israel to Mizpah and I will pray to the LORD for you.'"*⁶ *They gathered to Mizpah, and drew water and poured it out before the LORD, and fasted on that day and said there, 'We have sinned against the LORD.' And Samuel judged the sons of Israel at Mizpah."* (7:5-6)

Which Mizpah did Samuel designate as the gathering place for this meeting? There were four Mizpahs in the Promised Land, as we have detailed in the commentary on the book of Judges. This Mizpah was most likely the one closest to Samuel and his home, which was just a few miles from Shiloh. It was near Gibeah where the nation gathered when they fought and almost annihilated the tribe of Benjamin.

Notice that the writer tells of that Samuel's meeting was a time of prayer. It was not a time for partying. Therefore, no food was served or eaten at this prayer meeting. They did draw and pour water before the LORD. What does that mean? We do not know. There is no explicit connection with this act anywhere in Scripture. The closest thing we have does not really match in the context and is found in Psalm 22, verse 14 where the psalmist says, *"I am poured out like water, And all my bones are out of joint; My heart is like wax; It is melted within me."* If this is what Samuel means by the pouring out of the water before the LORD in this passage, it must mean that the people's lives were totally drained in their sin and could do nothing without the LORD. They were totally in despair.