

1 Samuel 6-7

- Last week's study ended in the somewhat humorous plight of the Philistines, who had unknowingly acquired a deadly artifact
 - After defeating the Israelites in battle, they captured the Ark of God
 - Once they brought it into their cities, one after another, the Lord visited the people with great tumors and death
 - The Ark made its way from city to city as residents tried to escape its destruction
 - As we observed last week, the Lord permitted this entire sequence of events to make a point both to Israel's enemies and to Israel itself
 - The nation of Israel was largely apostate
 - During the time of Judges, men did what was right in their own eyes
 - Which is a concise way of saying that Israel didn't consult the Lord or His word for counsel and direction
 - They didn't make the Lord's desires their priority
 - Instead, the people let their own personal agendas and fleshly desires dictate their paths
 - And nothing exemplified this truth better than the Israelites' decision to send the Ark into battle
 - After having been utterly crushed by the Philistines in battle, the people assemble at the house of the Lord in Shiloh questioning their fate
 - Why did the Lord lead them into battle only to bring them defeat?
 - What should they do to curry the Lord's favor for the next battle?
- They asked the right questions, but instead of seeking the Lord in His word for the answers, they do what seemed right in their own eyes
 - We learned last week that Samuel was ministering to Israel from Shiloh speaking the word of the Lord consistently

- And yet the people make no effort to seek Samuel's counsel
- Much less to ask what the Lord desired from the people
- Instead, they propose the Ark solution with the help of the two corrupt sons of the High Priest
 - The effect of their folly was an even more devastating defeat
 - The death of the High Priest and his sons
 - And the loss of the Ark
- So the Lord permits these outcomes to teach Israel a lesson about how one approaches and serves the Living God
 - And yet the faithfulness of God was also evident in the way He allowed the Philistines to capture the Ark
 - Their holding of the Ark gave opportunity for the Lord to defend Israel Himself
 - After the Lord granted these enemies of Israel such a great military victory, they could have conquered all the land
 - But the Lord saddled them with a great pestilence so that they were weakened and distracted, unable to re-engage in battle
 - More importantly, the Lord is displaying His power against the nations on behalf of His chosen people
- But the lessons for both Israel and the Philistines are not over yet
 - The Ark still needs to make its way back into Jewish hands
 - Ironically, God will use the Philistines to demonstrate to Israel the appropriate way to approach the Lord
 - But then the Israelites must relearn where they go to find the Lord's counsel and blessing
 - Not in superstition and ritual but according to His word
 - So we start in chapter 6 tonight, in the story of the Ark's return from the Philistines to Israel

1Sam. 6:1 Now the ark of the LORD had been in the country of the Philistines seven months.

1Sam. 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 shall send it to its place."

1Sam. 6:3 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."

1Sam. 6:4 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.

1Sam. 6:5 "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.

1Sam. 6:6 "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?"

1Sam. 6:7 "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.

1Sam. 6:8 "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.

1Sam. 6:9 "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."

- It's been seven months of torment for the people of the five Philistine cities
 - The number seven in scripture is God's way of communicating completeness
 - As we use the expression "100%" to mean the whole or completeness of something, so God uses "7"
 - So when we see seven months go by before the Ark is able to return to Israel, we are seeing the hand of God at work
 - Clearly, these people wanted the Ark gone on Day 1, given the calamity it produced
 - But it couldn't leave until God's purpose had been done, and the number seven reminds us that the purpose was now complete

- After seven months, the priests of Dagon and the diviners (or cultic prophets) were asked what will solve this problem?
 - How can they get rid of the Ark of the Lord
 - How do we send it away?
- If we stop to think about that question for a moment, we realize it says something about the attitude of these pagans
 - Why can't they simply destroy the thing or sink it at sea?
 - Why don't a bunch of men just carry the thing back to Israel's land and dump it on the side of the road?
 - Why is it so hard to get rid of it?
- The answer is that these pagans had an instinctive understanding that gods don't work that way
 - The power of God extends well beyond the physical realm
 - So it's not merely an issue of where the Ark resides physically
 - The problem the Philistines are facing is that the Lord of that Ark is not pleased with them
 - And one way or another, the Philistines must find a way to appease the Lord's wrath for their sin against Him
 - They realize that simply returning a wooden box isn't going to suffice
 - Instead, they must divine what will satisfy the Lord
 - Here we see the pagans operating with a fear and understanding of God's true power and divine authority
 - They are still pagans, so they do not understand the Lord as the One true God
 - Nevertheless, they at least appreciate divine power
 - In fact, we could say that the Philistines are demonstrating more fear of the Lord than Israel is at this time
- So how do these people appease the wrath of a God they don't know? How do they understand His desires when they do not have His word to counsel them?

- That's why they are seeking to discern it in other ways, through the advice of their own priests
 - Notice the solution the priests offer begins with an admission of guilt
 - The Ark can't just be sent away on its own
 - The people of the cities must include a guilt offering
 - Something of value must accompany the Ark as display of an admission of sin and a display of contrition
- Even pagans understand that you can't come before an angry God empty handed
 - In other words, there must be a payment for sin in some form
 - In this case, the Philistines are working without benefit of God's word and His Law, which was given to Israel alone
 - So they have to improvise a solution
- The priests propose that the Ark must be sent away with ten objects made of solid gold
 - They arrive at the number ten by taking the five of Philistine cities and creating two objects for each city
 - The objects are tumors and mice
 - Assuming these objects were substantial in size, this is a sizable amount of wealth, perhaps as much as \$1M in today's money
- First, why these objects?
 - Well, the tumors are an obvious choice
 - The plague was one of deadly tumors
 - So the offering is constructed in a form that memorializes God's work
 - The mice seem to be an odd choice, though some have suggested a logical connection
 - Mice are often associated with the spread of bubonic plague, which causes large tumors on the body

- Therefore, perhaps the tumors was actually the Black Death
- Taken together, the ten golden objects are a testimony to the Lord's wrath brought against the people for their sin in taking the Ark
 - In fact, the number 10 in scripture stands for "testimony"
 - So this becomes a clear sign testifying to the Lord's judgment against the Philistines' sin
- Finally, it's interesting that these pagans do not propose to make idols of God Himself
 - This would have been the more likely choice for a pagan people
 - When they wanted to honor a god, they set up physical representations of that god
 - Like we saw earlier with Dagon in his temple
 - But now they choose other objects to honor the God of Israel, which was in keeping with God's Law forbidding graven images
 - How ironic that the people of God, who had the word of the Lord, treated the Ark as a graven image as they dragged it into battle
 - While the pagans of the land have conspicuously avoided creating an image to God
 - Though they do not have the Law

Rom. 2:14 For when Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the Law, these, not having the Law, are a law to themselves,

Rom. 2:15 in that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them, As Paul wrote

- Then v.6 the priest declare that in this testimony would be to the glory of the Lord of Israel
 - That's exactly the purpose in this entire episode
 - The people of Israel had the Ark by God's grace
 - And the Ark and the tabernacle and the entire nation of Israel were created to be a light testifying to the nations
 - Together, they were to testify to the truth of God to His glory

- But Israel neglected that calling and became a people serving only themselves
- So, the Lord allowed the pagans of the land to take possession of His Ark
 - And by their possession of it, they became a testimony to God's glory
 - Obviously, their testimony came in the form of judgment, but it came nonetheless
- We can chose to be a testimony of God in our obedience
 - Or we can be a testimony to God's judgment for our disobedience
 - But one way or the other, the Lord will be glorified
 - In fact, the priests remind the people that the Lord has made them an example like He did Egypt
- This is ironic, because earlier the Philistines expressed fear when they heard the Israelites had brought the Ark into the camp
 - They said at that time they declared this is the Ark of the Lord who destroyed Egypt
 - It turns out they were prophetic, because now they are comparing themselves to Egypt again
- So now they have their plan to appease the Lord's wrath, but how will they know if God is appeased by their offering?
 - This leads to the second part of the priests' plan
 - They construct an improbable set of circumstances that will reveal the will of a sovereign and all-powerful God
 - They take two nursing cows and yoke them to a cart
 - They will place the Ark and guilt offering on the cart and send it in the direction of Israel
 - If the cows continue on their own to Israel, then the Lord has accepted their offering
 - If they return, then the people know the Lord has not answered them affirmatively

- The people can be sure this represents God's will because the deck is stacked against success
 - Nursing cows will not voluntarily leave their young
 - So if these cows are yoked and allowed to walk where they prefer, they will not head to Israel
 - They would return to their young
 - So if they go to Israel, it can only mean they were led there by the invisible sovereign hand of a God pleased with the offering
- So the Philistines have demonstrated the need to display repentance and propitiation before God, now they testify that God is sovereign
 - That He controls all things and speaks to those who seek His counsel
 - Granted, they are only seeing God in a limited way
 - And they do not possess the saving faith to acknowledge Him as Lord and Lords and King of Kings
 - Nevertheless, they are teaching Israel a thing or two about how one approaches the Living God
- So then they executed the plan as instructed...

1Sam. 6:10 Then the men did so, and took two milch cows and hitched them to the cart, and shut up their calves at home.

1Sam. 6:11 They put the ark of the LORD on the cart, and the box with the golden mice and the likenesses of their tumors.

1Sam. 6:12 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.

1Sam. 6:13 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.

1Sam. 6:14 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.

1Sam. 6:15 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.

1Sam. 6:16 When the five lords of the Philistines saw it, they returned to Ekron that day.

[1Sam. 6:17](#) 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; [1Sam. 6:18](#) 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.

- Once they were hitched up and sent on their way, the cows head directly east
 - In a true miracle, the cows go out of Ekron and toward Israel though they had never been harnessed to a yoke before
 - They should have resisted pulling
 - And they had calves waiting for them, so they should never have left town
 - But they go straight without meandering
 - And just to emphasize how the cows are operating according to the Lord's will, we're told they're lowing the whole way
 - This is a protest
 - The cows are very unhappy about leaving their calves
 - It's not in their nature to do what they're doing, but they are going because they are obeying their Creator and have no choice otherwise
 - These cows can serve as a beautiful picture of every child of God
 - By our fallen nature, we are not prone to follow and obey
 - Scripture says we are naturally inclined to serve our flesh rather than to follow the Spirit
 - But when we hear the word of God and do it, we demonstrate our love for Him
 - But like those cows, we will feel like lowing as we go
 - We may feel scared or uncomfortable
 - God's word never says that serving the Living God will be painless or trouble free

- Nevertheless, we go forward for that's what a heart of service does
- The cows head straight for Beth-shemesh, a small village about 15 miles west of Jerusalem
 - Beth-shemesh was the closest Jewish town to the Ark's last stop on the Philistine tour in Ekron
 - The name Beth-shemesh means house of the sun
 - Under the Canaanites, it was probably held a temple to the Canaanite sun god
 - As the Ark made it's way the seven mile journey up from the plains to the hill country, it passed through the Sorek Valley
 - This was the home of Samson, who was ruling at this time as well
 - Likely the Ark passed by many Jewish villagers working in their fields or walking on the same road
 - We might wonder why no one stopped the cart or tried to claim the Ark
 - The entire nation knew it had been lost seven months earlier
 - And the people were happy to see it, as we read
 - So how did it make it all the way to Beth-shemesh untouched?
- Because under the Mosaic Law, only the priests were permitted to handle the Ark of the Covenant
 - And even then, the priests were required to carry it using poles that slipped through golden rings on the side
 - If anyone else touched it, it meant death
 - So the Ark is moving in a solitary parade
 - Everyone who sees it is too afraid to interrupt its journey
 - But in these days, Beth-shemesh was a Levitical city
 - This means the town is full of Levites who were qualified to handle the Ark and bring it back to the tabernacle
 - And the first Levite to see the Ark in the town was a man named Joshua

- His name is also the name of the Messiah, Jesus (Yeshuah)
- So we could say the Ark is claimed by the priest named Yeshuah
- So Joshua's first thought is to give thanks for the Lord returning the Ark
 - And in God's providence, He provided all that was required for the sacrifice
 - With the Ark came the cows that would be sacrificed
 - And with the Ark came the cart that would become the wood for the sacrificial fire
 - And the Ark stopped immediately before a large stone uncut by human hands
- In other words, God gave His people the Ark, the sacrifice, the wood and the altar
 - And He provided a priest named Yeshuah
 - Can you see the message the Lord has embedded in these details?
 - A message of grace and rescue?
- What has Israel done to warrant the return of their precious Ark?
 - Did Israel repent first? Sacrifice first?
 - There is no evidence they have become the godly people the Lord desired
- But after seven months, the Lord returns His Ark to His people
 - He returns it as a matter of His grace, since He made those cows walk where they did
 - And God gave everything required for the restoration of fellowship
 - And He provided a man qualified to officiate at the altar
 - It was grace and grace alone that made this restoration possible
 - And God did all the work on behalf of His people
 - Obviously, we have a beautiful picture of the Gospel in Christ

- With the Ark and the guilt offering on the altar (rock), the Levites sacrificed and thanked the Lord
 - But that's not all that was going on during this day

1Sam. 6:19 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.

1Sam. 6:20 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?"

1Sam. 6:21 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."

1Sam. 7:1 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.

1Sam. 7:2 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.

- Apparently, during this day some of the priests decide to check out what's inside the Ark
 - Now the priests were permitted to carry the Ark
 - But no one was permitted to look inside the Ark, according to Number 4:5
 - So these priests, those who were given custody of the Ark, are quickest to violate the Law
- Here's further evidence that the hearts of the people, including the priests, remain far from God's word
 - Once again, their irreverent behavior stands in contrast to the way the pagans feared and respected the Ark, at least at a point
 - So if the Lord judged the pagans for their disobedience, how do you think the Lord should respond to a people who know better?
 - And not just the Jewish people, but the priests in particular
- The Lord responds by keeping His word according to the Law, putting to death 50,070 men
 - The number is remarkable for it's magnitude and its symbology

- This must have represented a sizable number of the male Levites living in Beth-shemesh
- And the extra seventy men tacked on at the end makes clear that this was the work of the Lord in response to their sin
- (Some translations report a much smaller number, but the textual support favors the larger number as does the peoples' response.)
- In response to the death of so many, the remaining Levites lament and ask rhetorically who is able to stand before the Lord?
 - This is an interesting response
 - They don't say we have sinned and the Lord punished us according to His word, which would have been the truth
 - Instead, they suggest the Lord is unreasonable
 - Implying that no one could remain alive in the face of such a fierce and unreasonable God
 - Clearly we don't yet see repentant hearts at work
 - So in an ironic twist, they do very much as the pagans
 - They call for a small neighboring town to accept the Ark
 - The town is called Kiriath-jearim, which is another 10 miles east
 - This is not a Levite town, so there was no one in this town capable of handling or moving the Ark
 - So they find a man named Abinadab to house the Ark and they consecrated his son, Eleazar, to attend to the Ark
 - Basically, a corrupt and dysfunctional priesthood dumps the most precious object from the house of God in a random Jewish home
 - And they deputize a young man to attend to the Ark, which basically meant to guard it
 - And then they run away

- If you remember the scene at the end of the movie Raiders of the Lost Ark when it's rolled into a giant warehouse, that's what's happening here
- And here it remained for 20 years while Shiloh lamented its absence
 - The people of Israel were determined to use the Ark like a cultic object
 - They assumed they could receive God's blessings by putting the Ark to work
 - To which God replied, no you can't
 - And instead of blessing, they received His judgment
 - Now that the Ark has returned, the people still have an unhealthy fascination with the Ark as a relic
 - So the Lord hides it for twenty years
 - And he virtually wipes out one city of the corrupt priesthood
 - His point to the people is that He cares about His covenant and the peoples' obedience to the Law of that covenant
 - If they want to receive His blessing, obey the covenant they entered into
 - If they want to see the Ark, then treat it as the Law requires
 - Everything comes back to the word of God
- So with that recognition, we reach a turning point of sorts in the period of judges, when the people begin to listen to the word of the Lord

1Sam. 7:3 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 Ashtaroath 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."

1Sam. 7:4 So the sons of Israel removed the Baals and the Ashtaroath and served the LORD alone.

1Sam. 7:5 Then Samuel said, "Gather all Israel to Mizpah and I will pray to the LORD for you."

1Sam. 7:6 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.

- Now Samuel returns to the foreground of the story
 - The last time we saw him, he was giving the word of the Lord in Shiloh
 - But no one was listening
 - Now that the people have endured a slaughter at the hands of their enemies
 - And another at the hand of the Lord, they are ready to listen it would seem
 - So Samuel says here's the answer you've been missing
 - If you return to the Lord with all your heart, removing the idols and serving God alone, you will see the delivery you want
 - The Lord will put an end to the torment of the Philistines
 - But the people must seek Him on God's terms
 - Not in superstition or ritual
 - But according to the covenant
 - So the people do as Samuel suggests
 - There is clear evidence of repentance
 - The people head down to a town near the Jordan and begin a fast to the Lord
 - Samuel prays to the Lord for deliverance from the Philistines
 - And the people poured out water to the Lord, a washing ceremony indicating repentance
 - What a contrast with the previous episode
 - Before they went out in prideful confidence wielding the Ark
 - Attempting to control the Lord like any other idol
 - Now they set aside idols and submit to the Lord in humble hearts
 - This is how God's people approach
- Now we see the result:

[1Sam. 7:7](#) Now when the Philistines heard that the sons of Israel had gathered to Mizpah, the lords of the Philistines went up against Israel. And when the sons of Israel heard it, they were afraid of the Philistines.

[1Sam. 7:8](#) Then the sons of Israel said to Samuel, "Do not cease to cry to the LORD our God for us, that He may save us from the hand of the Philistines."

[1Sam. 7:9](#) Samuel took a suckling lamb and offered it for a whole burnt offering to the LORD; and Samuel cried to the LORD for Israel and the LORD answered him.

[1Sam. 7:10](#) Now Samuel was offering up the burnt offering, and the Philistines drew near to battle against Israel. But the LORD thundered with a great thunder on that day against the Philistines and confused them, so that they were routed before Israel.

[1Sam. 7:11](#) The men of Israel went out of Mizpah and pursued the Philistines, and struck them down as far as below Beth-car.

[1Sam. 7:12](#) Then Samuel took a stone and set it between Mizpah and Shen, and named it Ebenezer, saying, "Thus far the LORD has helped us."

[1Sam. 7:13](#) So the Philistines were subdued and they did not come anymore within the border of Israel. And the hand of the LORD was against the Philistines all the days of Samuel.

[1Sam. 7:14](#) The cities which the Philistines had taken from Israel were restored to Israel, from Ekron even to Gath; and Israel delivered their territory from the hand of the Philistines. So there was peace between Israel and the Amorites.

- With the people of Israel massed on their eastern border in the valley, the Philistines think this is their opportunity
 - The people of Israel will be sitting ducks
 - And when Israel learns that a army is approaching, they are naturally afraid
 - But notice the change in response from times prior
 - This time they turn to Samuel and ask him to appeal on their behalf
 - Last time they could have done this very same thing, but they elected to follow Eli's sons into the tabernacle and claim the Ark
 - Now they make the right choice and ask the Lord's anointed to intercede
 - And Samuel burns an offering and cries to the Lord, and the Lord hears and answers

- This is the first time we've been told the Lord heard and answered the people of Israel
- Finally, when it comes time for battle, the Lord fights the fight entirely
 - The people don't even have to raise a finger
 - The Lord confuses the army of the Philistines so that the people of Israel can defeat them easily
 - And later they run the Philistines out of their cities
 - And all during Samuel's life the people are free from the tyranny of the Philistines
 - All this made possible by trusting in the Lord by His word
- As Hannah sang at Samuel's conception and as Zechariah says as well

[Zech. 4:6](#) Then he said to me, "This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel saying, 'Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,' says the LORD of hosts.