

1 Samuel 5:1-7:1 — The Ark Returns

February 20, 2022

Good morning! My name is Kurt. I am one of the pastors. As you know, we finished a capital campaign for the new Spencer Campus in January but people are continuing to give. Our original goal was to raise \$650,000. As of last week, we went from \$542,000 to \$567,000 raised. It is amazing to see the generosity of the people of God to the work of reaching more people with Jesus.

For those of you wanting to learn more about the design of the new Spencer Campus, we receive a copy of the blueprints this week. I put them on the large TV on the west side of the foyer so you can check out the blueprints for the main floor of the facility.

Right now, it feels like I am always talking buildings and budgets. Realize that is not what CrossWinds is about. Buildings and budgets are only tools to help us achieve our mission. That mission is reaching people with Jesus.

When it comes to reaching people with Jesus, our strategy is to reach our community by serving our community. Each of us is not to be in a little Christian bubble with our church friends. Jesus called us to be salt and light in the world. We are to rub shoulders with people in the community, and we want to go out of our way to do good works in our community. We believe good works create goodwill which will open the door to people hearing the good news. On both of our campuses, we want to be in the regular habit of looking for ways to love and serve the community around us.

Right now, I need your help to do that better. We are brainstorming ways to better serve our community. I want you to brainstorm with me. I asked Life

Group leaders to take a few minutes in Life Groups this week to brainstorm ideas how we can better serve our community. I asked the Life Group leaders to e-mail me those lists so we can pray and strategize over them.

Ideally, we are looking to develop a long-term relationship where we meet real needs. It would be especially good if there are ways we can help our local schools.

In Spencer, this past week we were able to find and accomplish meeting a real need in the Spencer community. The new Spencer Campus is located next to the Iowa Lakes Community College dormitories. Many of those students, especially the ones in sports, are not from America. They don't have cars or a way to get around town. We worked with the Rides bus in Spencer. They gave us a good rate. We underwrote the rest of the cost to provide free transportation for Iowa Lakes College students around Spencer. This will enable the students to get a ride to Wal-Mart, Menards, or wherever they need to go. I am thankful we can help with that real need. Special thanks to Jeremy Leu — our interim worship director — who is from Spencer and was able to help us set that up.

Let's pray and get into our study.

What is a war trophy? For those of you who are not familiar with that term, it is something the winning side in a war takes from the losing side after the war is over. It is a type of souvenir. It is a memory of great victory. Since war trophies are a piece of history and there is a lot of emotion around them, they can be very expensive to purchase. Here are some examples of war trophies I found online this week.

Here is a postcard from Heinrich Himmler. He was a leading member of the Nazi party and the main architect of the holocaust. How much do you think this postcard sells for online? \$479!



Here is a collar patch from one of Hitler's SS troops. How much do you think they want for it on the Internet? \$729.

Here is a helmet from one of Hitler's SS troops. It is a special helmet. It was made for the tropics. How much do you think they are asking



for this war trophy online? \$4,759.



Old dusty war trophies are extremely valuable. They are a piece of history. This morning, we are going to look at a war trophy that everyone thought was incredibly valuable but before long they desperately wanted to get rid of it. What war trophy are we talking about? You will find out in a moment.

In our study of 1 Samuel, last week we saw the Israelites bring the ark of the covenant from Shiloh 20 miles to the city of Ebenezer. They expected the ark would help them in the battle against the Philistines. They were using the ark like a lucky rabbit's foot, a good luck charm. God doesn't work that way. God's ark can't be manipulated to force God's favor. It doesn't work that way. The Israelites were terribly defeated. Thirty-four thousand Israelites died. The ark was captured

and taken into Philistine territory. This morning, we pick up in 1 Samuel 5. This chapter is the story of what happened to the ark when it was a trophy of war behind enemy lines.

This morning, I plan to cover 1 Samuel 5 and 6. If you know me, that is a lot of text. Some of you are already thinking you should have packed a lunch. Don't worry, we will keep moving and be done on time. Along the way, you will find these chapters have a fair amount of humor in them that will keep us laughing.

The Double Defeat of Dagon

When the Philistines captured the ark of God, they brought it from Ebenezer to Ashdod. 1 Samuel 5:1 (ESV)

Last week, I showed you a map in Israel that shows the location of the battle between the Philistines in Aphek and the Israelites in Ebenezer. I also showed you the five major Philistine cities. Each city had



a “Lord” who was like a mini-king. After capturing the ark, the Philistines moved the ark 30 miles southwest into the heart of Philistine territory to the city of Ashdod.

Then the Philistines took the ark of God and brought it into the house of Dagon and set it up beside Dagon. 1 Samuel 5:2 (ESV)

Dagon was the chief of the Philistine gods. He was a fish god. He was a fish-face-looking guy. They associated him with vegetation and fertility. If you wanted good crops and lots of livestock, you kept the fish-face god happy.

Putting the ark in the house of Dagon and setting the ark up beside Dagon was a

way of declaring the ark to be a trophy of war. This didn't just show which army was more powerful, but in the eyes of the Philistines, it showed which god was more powerful. This victory over the Israelites really puffed up the Philistine ego. They knew the God of the Israelites defeated mighty Egypt and their gods. Now they reasoned Dagon, their fishy-faced god, had done what none of the gods of Egypt were able to do, destroy the God of the Israelites.

You can sense the big ego of the Philistines just by looking at the language they use. "They captured... they brought... they set up." They thought they were in control.

That attitude didn't last for long. All we need to do is go to the next verse.

And when the people of Ashdod rose early the next day, behold, Dagon had fallen face downward on the ground before the ark of the Lord. So they took Dagon and put him back in his place. 1 Samuel 5:3 (ESV)

Overnight something happened. We are not told what. When people came to the temple, they found the large statue of Dagon was pushed over in front of the ark. Notice it was lying flat with its face in the dirt in front of the ark. Dagon had fallen into submission before the ark. He was bowing before the God of Israel.

Culturally, this was significant. In that day, when a king was defeated, he bowed before his opponent and put his face in the dirt. Everybody recognized this was the posture of a defeated king. Maybe Dagon wasn't victorious after all!

To emphasize the complete helplessness of Dagon, the author of 1 Samuel tells us the people had to pick Dagon up and put him back on his perch. So much for mighty Dagon. He couldn't even get his face out of the dirt without his worshippers doing it for him. The next morning, it was worse.

But when they rose early on the next morning, behold, Dagon had fallen face downward on the ground before the ark of the LORD, and the head of Dagon and both his hands were lying cut off on the threshold. Only the trunk of Dagon was left to him. 1 Samuel 5:4 (ESV)

The next morning, Dagon was fallen over with his face in the dirt in front of the ark again. This time his head and his hands were cut off. They were then picked up and put on the threshold of the entry to his temple --- that means right under the doorframe where everyone enters. The point was clear. Dagon's head and hands were not broken off. They were cut off. After they were cut off, they were picked up and moved to the front door of the temple for everyone to see.

What was going on? In that time, the way you humiliated an enemy after you killed your enemy was you cut off his head and hands as a way of emphasizing that he was completely powerless in front of you. The enemy couldn't act, couldn't hear, couldn't speak.

When people found Dagon with his head and hands cut off before the ark, they knew this meant Dagon was completely defeated and was powerless in front of the God of Israel. The God of Israel was beating up Dagon in his own temple. That was completely insulting and totally humiliating.

This is why the priests of Dagon and all who enter the house of Dagon do not tread on the threshold of Dagon in Ashdod to this day. 1 Samuel 5:5 (ESV)

The author of 1 Samuel paused to make comment. If you think this didn't happen, know this is why the priests of Dagon, who were in Ashdod, did not walk on the threshold when they came into the temple. That is where they found the head and arms of Dagon cut off one morning.

Let's stop and apply this.

Many people who encounter the truth of God will stubbornly resist.

Think about this logically. Don't you think it would be logical to reconsider Dagon as your god at this point? Don't you think it would be worth maybe considering the God of Israel was far superior to the helpless fish-face god you worshipped and had to keep propping back upon his shelf after the God of Israel kept knocking him over?

That isn't what happened. Instead, they turned the threshold of the temple into a holy place, a sacred place. Here are some applications.

There is only one God in the universe. He is alive. He is all-powerful. He raises the dead. Today, right now, he is in the business of changing people's lives. All the other gods out there are useless and powerless before him.

Another application is we must expect there will be people who see God's work and reject it, even after it is abundantly obvious that what they are living for and trusting in is a dead-end road. It happened to Jesus. Jesus healed the sick, raised the dead, and fed thousands, but the religious leaders rejected and killed him.

We should expect to have the same thing happen to us. When we become Christians, Jesus changes our lives. When we tell people how Jesus has changed us and when people see how Jesus has changed us, many times they will stubbornly refuse to believe Jesus made a difference. They will stubbornly cling to their old dead-end ways and powerless religions. We should expect this to happen.

God's heavy hand on the Philistines

What happened at the temple of Dagon was only the beginning of the trouble for the Philistines.

The hand of the Lord was heavy against the people of Ashdod, and he terrified and afflicted them with tumors, both Ashdod and its territory. 1 Samuel 5:6 (ESV)

It says the hand of the Lord was heavy against the people of Ashdod. The word for heavy is the same word used to describe Eli's large weight last week. The picture is God was going to lean on them a bit. He was going to crush them a bit and see if they got the message about who was really in charge.

It also says God terrified them. The word terrified means God attacked them psychologically. He produced anxiety, fear, worry, and terror in the people. We will see God engaged in both psychological and physical warfare against the Philistines.

It says God began afflicting these Philistines with tumors. We know what a tumor is, but there is more to this than is readily apparent. The Hebrew word used could refer to a generic tumor that is a swelling or growth. It could be used in a more specific sense, in that case, it is referring to hemorrhoids. God began giving these people a terrible case of hemorrhoids so they couldn't even sit down. God as kicking them in the seat! Which way should we translate this Hebrew word? Is it referring to a generic tumor or is it used in a more specific sense meaning hemorrhoids? The Masoretic scribes who carefully copied and guarded the Old Testament had a little comment on this verse. They understood this Hebrew word to be referring to hemorrhoids. While they certainly are not flawless in their understanding of Scripture, the long-standing and ultra-conservative nature of these scribes means hemorrhoids is a legitimate translation we should seriously consider.

Yesterday, I was getting in some extra study on this text and I realized the way God was handing out punishment on the Philistines was the way he promised to hand out punishment on his own people if they disobeyed his law. Specifically, God would engage in both physical and psychological warfare against them. We can see this in the book of Deuteronomy. For many of us, the idea of God engaging in not just physical but also psychological warfare against sin is a new idea, yet it is clearly found in the Bible.

The Lord will strike you with the boils of Egypt, and with tumors and scabs and itch, of which you cannot be healed. The Lord will strike you with madness and blindness and confusion of mind... Deuteronomy 28:27-28 (ESV)

One of the gifts of being in the right relationship with God is a sound mind. God doesn't just punish sin physically but he punished it psychologically.

So at this point, we have God engaging in psychological and physical warfare against the Philistines. The physical warfare involves people having a terrible case of hemorrhoids. Can you picture this? I mean you can't make this stuff up, but it is in the Bible.

While the Masoretic Scribes, who guarded and copied the Old Testament text from the fifth to the 10th centuries felt this was hemorrhoids, some modern scholars think these tumors were a case of the bubonic plague. That is also known as the black death. It was typically carried by fleas on rodents. In the Middle Ages, it killed approximately 25 million people, two-thirds of the population of Europe. Most of the people who contracted it died. If you contracted it, you developed large swollen lymph nodes (buboes) that would protrude from the skin. They eventually burst and leaked puss. The fingers and toes would go black as they died of gangrene. It was a horrifying way to die.

I don't know if God struck these Philistines with a massive case of hemorrhoids or the bubonic plague. It may have been something completely different. What I do know is God's hand was heavy upon them. God was not just beating up and cutting up their false gods in their temples but he was also beating up the Philistines themselves. Things were not going well for the Philistines who brought home the ark as a trophy of war.

And when the men of Ashdod saw how things were, they said, "The ark of the God of Israel must not remain with us, for his hand is hard against us and against Dagon our god." 1 Samuel 5:7 (ESV)

The God of Israel keeps beating us up, and he keeps beating our god up. Dagon is not strong enough to protect us. We better get rid of the ark. A better response would have been to repent and trust in the God of the ark, but that didn't cross their minds.

So they sent and gathered together all the lords of the Philistines and said, "What shall we do with the ark of the God of Israel?" They answered, "Let the ark of the God of Israel be brought around to Gath." So they brought the ark of the God of Israel there. 1 Samuel 5:8 (ESV)



Remember there were five cities of the Philistines. Each city had a "lord." The lord was the head of the city. These five lords had an alliance. They functioned like NATO. When they made decisions, these five guys got together and made decisions as a group.

I don't know what happened. Maybe the Lord of Gath was late to the meeting. Maybe it was like the "Survivor" television show and two or three of the other leaders made a behind-the-scenes alliance against him. I don't know how it happened. I just know the Lord of Gath was not excited that it happened. It was

decided to bring the ark to his city. At this point, one thing is clear, even though things were rough, they were not ready to give back the ark. It was their prize war trophy. It was still too valuable.

But after they had brought it around, the hand of the LORD was against the city, causing a very great panic, and he afflicted the men of the city, both young and old, so that tumors broke out on them. 1 Samuel 5:9 (ESV)

As soon as the ark came to the city, tumors began breaking out on people. As the Masoretic scribes understood this text, it was hemorrhoids on both the young and the old. Everybody was freaking out. The word panic is interesting. In other parts of the Old Testament, it is the word used to describe the psychological terror God inflicted on the enemies of Israel when they went to war against Israel. For a second time, we see God attacking the Philistines both physically and psychologically. It didn't take long, and the people of Gath had enough. They were ready to ship the ark out of their town.

So they sent the ark of God to Ekron. But as soon as the ark of God came to Ekron, the people of Ekron cried out, "They have brought around to us the ark of the God of Israel to kill us and our people." 1 Samuel 5:10 (ESV)

Notice this time they didn't have a meeting of the Philistine lords. The people of Gath decided to get rid of the ark and dump it on their nearest neighbors in Ekron. They weren't interested in anybody else's advice.



As soon as the people of Ekron heard the ark was on its way to their town, they weren't having any of it. They were more upset about this than parents at a school board meeting fighting over Critical Race Theory. They refused to take the ark not just because God was psychologically and physically

tormenting people who had the ark, but now God was also killing people. What we see is over time, God continued to step up the intensity of his attack on the Philistines. The ark may have been a great war trophy but everybody wanted to get rid of it. Nobody wanted the ark.

They sent therefore and gathered together all the lords of the Philistines and said, "Send away the ark of the God of Israel, and let it return to its own place, that it may not kill us and our people." For there was a deathly panic throughout the whole city. The hand of God was very heavy there. 1 Samuel 5:11 (ESV)

They gathered the Philistine lords again. Notice the people were not asking the Philistine lords what they should do about the ark. They were telling the Philistine lords what they had to do with the ark. "Get rid of it! Return it to its own place! Give it back! It is killing us." Everyone was in a panic. Notice it says the hand of God was VERY heavy on them at this time. God kept ratcheting up the pressure.

The men who did not die were struck with tumors, and the cry of the city went up to heaven. 1 Samuel 5:12 (ESV)

This is interesting. It started out saying God struck people with tumors. Here it says the men who did not die were struck with tumors. At first, tumors were the worst thing that happened to you. At this point, tumors were the best thing that happened to you. The other option was you died.

This was quite a turn of events. The chapter started with the Philistines thinking they were hot stuff. They had the ark of God as a war trophy. Then their gods were beaten up in their own temples. People were dying. Everyone had hemorrhoids. They were in psychological panic and madness. They couldn't wait to get rid of the ark.

This reminds us there is no comparison between the God of Israel and other gods. All other gods are worthless. They are impotent. They are powerless. There is nothing they can do for you. They cannot even defend themselves.

I also want to look at the flow of the story. There is a lesson we can learn. When did God begin to rescue the ark from captivity? It was only after God's people were defeated. The ark was defeated and taken as a trophy of war and put in a pagan temple. It was when all hope was lost and it appeared that God was defeated that God began to exercise his might to rescue the ark. Isn't that the way God often works? Think of Egypt. God's people were in captivity there. It was when all hope was lost --- when they were forced to kill their own male children and make bricks without straw --- that God exercised his power and came to the rescue of his people. Isn't this the same way it worked for Jesus? It was after he was crucified, dead, and buried, and it looked like utter defeat, that God exercised his mighty power and raised Jesus from the grave.

This is a lesson for each of us. There will be times in life when the wheels fall off. Life falls apart. Things look hopeless. We must not despair. It is in times of great hopelessness that God works the power of his mightiest rescues. Even in the face of death, when we face the utter defeat of sin, that is when Jesus snatches us from the gates of hell and brings us home to heaven because of our faith in him.

My friends, I do not know what dark times of despair you are facing today, but if you are a child of God, do not lose hope. It is in the darkest hour that God loves to provide his brightest victories.

If chapter five was about the ark behind enemy lines. Chapter 6 is the story of how the ark came home. Let's see how the ark returned.

The ark of the LORD was in the country of the Philistines seven months. 1 Samuel 6:1 (ESV)

Seven months is a long time. When did God start beating up the Philistines and their gods? How long did they have to wait until God started handing out punishment? It began the day after the ark arrived. The Philistines were stubborn people. They let God keep beating them up for seven months. During that time, God didn't maintain the pressure. He kept on increasing the pressure and the severity of his hand upon them.

And the Philistines called for the priests and the diviners and said, "What shall we do with the ark of the LORD? Tell us with what we shall send it to its place." 1 Samuel 6:2 (ESV)

The Philistine lords finally got the message. They had to get rid of the ark. This war trophy was causing all kinds of trouble. They knew they couldn't just dump it in the mountains. The God of the Hebrews would really be angry at them if they tried that trick. Not knowing how to get out of this mess, they called their priests and diviners. They needed help in the god department.

They said, "If you send away the ark of the God of Israel, do not send it empty, but by all means return him a guilt offering. Then you will be healed, and it will be known to you why his hand does not turn away from you." 1 Samuel 6:3 (ESV)

A guilt offering comes from the Hebrew law. It was an acknowledgment of sin and that your sin put you in debt to God. In this case, it was a way of them saying, "We really messed up. We shouldn't have taken the ark."

One other thing I want us to notice is at this point, we are starting to see echoes of the Exodus. There are many parallels between God rescuing his

people from bondage in Egypt in the Exodus and God rescuing his ark from bondage with the Philistines. Let me show you some of the parallels.

1. The word “send it away” is the same word used by Moses when he spoke to Pharaoh and said, “Let my people go.” The ark's departure from the country of the Philistines was like God taking his people out of Egypt.
2. The Israelites were not to leave Egypt empty-handed. They were to take gold and silver jewelry with them. In a moment, we will see the Philistines sent the ark back with a bunch of gold.

And I will give this people favor in the sight of the Egyptians; and when you go, you shall not go empty, but each woman shall ask of her neighbor, and any woman who lives in her house, for silver and gold jewelry, and for clothing... Exodus 3:21–22 (ESV)

Let's look at the guilt offering the priests and diviners told them to return with the ark.

And they said, “What is the guilt offering that we shall return to him?” They answered, “Five golden tumors and five golden mice, according to the number of the lords of the Philistines, for the same plague was on all of you and on your lords. So you must make images of your tumors and images of your mice that ravage the land, and give glory to the God of Israel. Perhaps he will lighten his hand from off you and your gods and your land. 1 Samuel 6:4–5 (ESV)

At this point, it is hard to keep a straight face. There is a lots of humor in these verses. Make images of five golden tumors. One for each of you. The five rulers of the Philistines apparently suffered from these tumors, these hemorrhoids. They were to make gold models of the hemorrhoids that each Philistine lord had on his body. Can you see the Philistine lords posing for a craftsman to make an accurate golden replica of a hemorrhoid?

The diviners also said to make five golden mice. Apparently, more was going on than Dagon getting knocked over, tumors (hemorrhoids), and a plague

of death. Remember God kept ratcheting up the pressure. Apparently at this point mice were overrunning the land eating the crops.

It also says they were to give glory to the God of Israel. In some form or fashion they were to give honor and some time of worship to the God of Israel. In chapter 5 the Philistines had a big ego because they thought they conquered the God of Israel and stole his ark. Now they were forced to worship the God of Israel and return his ark. Who had the last laugh?

It also says, "...perhaps he will lighten his hand from you and your gods..." Apparently, Dagon was not the only god that was beaten and broken up. He was only one of the Philistine gods beaten and broken up by the presence of the ark.

Why should you harden your hearts as the Egyptians and Pharaoh hardened their hearts? After he had dealt severely with them, did they not send the people away, and they departed? 1 Samuel 6:6 (ESV)

I love this line. Earlier the Philistines mentioned knowing about the Exodus and the destruction of Egypt by the God of Israel. The priests and diviners realized they were under attack from the God of Israel. They also remembered how foolish and stubborn Pharaoh was when God was attacking Egypt. Egypt was destroyed because Pharaoh refused to let the people of God go. The priests and diviners were begging the Philistine lords to not be stubborn but to let the ark of God go before the land of the Philistines was also destroyed by the power of God. Don't be hard-hearted and stubborn when God is trying to get your attention.

That is something we can learn also learn for our lives. Sometimes we are stubborn and hard-hearted when God is trying to get us to repent or to change direction in life. Let us not be that way.

Let's see the plan to send the ark back.

Now then, take and prepare a new cart and two milk cows on which there has never come a yoke, and yoke the cows to the cart, but take their calves home, away from them. And take the ark of the LORD and place it on the cart and put in a box at its side the figures of gold, which you are returning to him as a guilt offering. Then send it off and let it go its way and watch. If it goes up on the way to its own land, to Beth-shemesh, then it is he who has done us this great harm, but if not, then we shall know that it is not his hand that struck us; it happened to us by coincidence." 1 Samuel 6:7–9 (ESV)

The probability of the ark heading back to Israel is stacked against it.

These cows had never been yoked before. That meant they were unlikely to cooperate. They would fight against one another and not work together with one another. These cows were also feeding their newborn calves. A cow is almost inseparable from her calf. These cows would want to walk back home. The odds were stacked against these cows heading to Israel.

So the Philistine lords put the ark, the golden tumors, and the golden mice on the cart. They put the cows in front of the cart. Then they let them go. If the cows went back home, the whole thing was a strange coincidence. If the cows took the ark back to Israel, they would know God wanted his ark back and God was behind all the disaster in their land.

Beth-Shemesh was about 7 miles east of Ekron. It was the nearest Israelite encampment where the ark could be sent. It also happened to be a Levitical city. In a moment, we will see why that is important.

The men did so, and took two milk cows and yoked them to the cart and shut up their calves at home. And they put the ark of the LORD on the cart and the box with the golden mice and the images of their tumors. And the cows went straight in the direction of Beth-shemesh along one highway, lowing as they went. They turned neither to the right nor to the left, and the lords of the Philistines went after them as far as the border of Beth-shemesh. 1 Samuel 6:10–12 (ESV)

They put the cows in the front of the cart, the ark and the golden images of tumors and mice on the cart, and off it went. It went straight in the direction of Beth-Shemesh like it was on a highway. That means it traveled straight as an arrow back home. How often do you see cows walk in a straight line? Never. These cows had never been yoked but walked in a straight line back to Israel. The author emphasized this by reminding us there was no change in direction or wandering around. They went straight to the nearest Israelite town.

The cows were lowing as they went. I am not a farmer. The farmers can correct me. This is what little I know about cows. We have a farm behind us. They have cows. The cows are usually quiet until they are upset. When the farmer forgets to feed the cows or he makes them do something they do not want to do, they start lowing because they are upset. In our text, it seems to me these cows were upset. They were not going in the direction they wanted to go. They were going in the direction God made them go.

The Philistines just followed this whole thing, amazed as they watched it happen. Let's see what happens next.

Now the people of Beth-shemesh were reaping their wheat harvest in the valley. And when they lifted up their eyes and saw the ark, they rejoiced to see it. 1 Samuel 6:13 (ESV)

It was seven months since the Israelites lost the battle of Aphek and the ark was captured. Hearing the cows, then seeing them bringing the ark home was a sight that I am sure sent tears running down their faces. They rejoiced is an understatement. They were thrilled.

The cart came into the field of Joshua of Beth-shemesh and stopped there. A great stone was there. And they split up the wood of the cart and offered the cows as a burnt offering to the Lord. And the Levites took down the ark of the

Lord and the box that was beside it, in which were the golden figures, and set them upon the great stone. And the men of Beth-shemesh offered burnt offerings and sacrificed sacrifices on that day to the Lord. 1 Samuel 6:14–15 (ESV)

Why did the cart stop beside a great stone? God stopped it. God was guiding it Beth-Shemesh. God stopped it in Beth-Shemesh. God rescued his ark from captivity. Beth-Shemesh was a Levite city. The priests knew what to do. They killed the cows, cut up the cart and offered burnt offerings in thanks to God.

And when the five lords of the Philistines saw it, they returned that day to Ekron. These are the golden tumors that the Philistines returned as a guilt offering to the LORD: one for Ashdod, one for Gaza, one for Ashkelon, one for Gath, one for Ekron, and the golden mice, according to the number of all the cities of the Philistines belonging to the five lords, both fortified cities and unwallled villages. The great stone beside which they set down the ark of the LORD is a witness to this day in the field of Joshua of Beth-shemesh. 1 Samuel 6:16–18 (ESV)

When this was written, it sounds like the golden tumors and golden mice were still around. The author of 1 Samuel was explaining where they came from. It also looks like there were more than five mice with the ark. There were enough mice for all the cities, walled, and unwallled. Just to make sure, they put extra mice with the cart. Apparently, the plague of mice was pretty bad and they wanted to make sure they got rid of the plague.

It would be nice if the story ended here. It doesn't. We saw what happened to the Philistines when they defied the power of God. Now we will see what will happen to the Israelites when they do the same thing.

And he struck some of the men of Beth-shemesh, because they looked upon the ark of the LORD. He struck seventy men of them, and the people mourned because the LORD had struck the people with a great blow. 1 Samuel 6:19 (ESV)

What happened here? Some of the men of Beth-shemesh looked upon the ark of the Lord. It can't mean that they looked on the outside of the ark. Lots

of people had done that at this point. It must mean they popped the lid and looked inside the ark. It didn't end well. God struck 70 of them with a great blow. In Hebrew, the word for blow can also be translated as slaughter. In other words, God killed them for looking inside the ark. They were Levites. They should have known better. In God's law, God said nobody was allowed to look inside the ark.

“...but they shall not go in to look on the holy things even for a moment, lest they die.” Numbers 4:20 (ESV)

They should have learned from the Philistines. They treated God casually, disrespectfully. Hophni and Phinehas treated God disrespectfully and they died. The Philistines treated God casually and disrespectfully, even though they knew better, and they died. Let's see how these guys responded to this great slaughter.

Then the men of Beth-shemesh said, “Who is able to stand before the Lord, this holy God? And to whom shall he go up away from us?” So they sent messengers to the inhabitants of Kiriath-jearim, saying, “The Philistines have returned the ark of the Lord. Come down and take it up to you.” 1 Samuel 6:20–21 (ESV)

They were no different from the Philistines. Instead of examining their hearts and lives for sin, they just sent the ark to their neighbors so it would kill them. So much for loving your neighbor.

And the men of Kiriath-jearim came and took up the ark of the LORD and brought it to the house of Abinadab on the hill. And they consecrated his son Eleazar to have charge of the ark of the LORD. From the day that the ark was lodged at Kiriath-jearim, a long time passed, some twenty years, and all the house of Israel lamented after the LORD. 1 Samuel 7:1–2 (ESV)

These guys treated the ark differently. They treated it respectfully and rightly. They set up a priest who guarded and properly treated the ark. They had absolutely no trouble. The ark remained with them for the next 20 years until David took the ark to Jerusalem.

What are we to learn from these long stories with their strange details? Let me give you two lessons. One from each chapter.

Applications

1. **God loves to send rescue when things look hopeless.** In chapter 5, we saw there was a strong connection between God saving his people out of Egypt and God saving the ark from the Philistines. In both cases, the situation was helpless. In both cases, God waited until it appeared all hope was lost before he worked his mighty hand of rescue and restoration. That way, God got all the credit. People got none of it. In the Bible, we see this is usually the way God works. God rescued his people out of Egypt when the situation was hopeless. He rescued his ark when the situation was hopeless. He rescued Jesus from the grave when the situation was hopeless. When we find ourselves facing a situation that is hopeless, that is often when God loves to use his mighty power to rescue his children from disaster.
2. **The answer for how anyone can stand against God's wrath is found in the construction of the ark.**

The key question of 1 Samuel 6 is found in verse 20.

Then the men of Beth-shemesh said, "Who is able to stand before the Lord, this holy God?..." 1 Samuel 6:20 (ESV)

God destroyed the Philistines. God destroyed the priests of Beth-Shemesh. How can anyone stand before God? The answer to that question is found in the construction of the ark.

Remember the ark was a golden box that contained the Ten Commandments. On top of the ark were the two cherubim. God was said to dwell

between them. These two angels looked down at the ark, as if into the ark. Their eyes were looking at the Ten Commandments of God below their feet. These are the holy requirements of God that all of us have broken. All of us are deserving of God's wrath.

There was another feature of the ark. It was the golden cover. This was known as the mercy seat. It was on this cover, the mercy seat, that the blood of goats and lambs was sprinkled. The holy God no longer looked at the Ten Commandments his people have violated but he looked at the blood of the animals that covered our sin.

That was all Old Testament. How does this change for us in New Testament times?

God says this about Jesus.

...whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith... Romans 3:25 (ESV)

The word propitiation is the Greek word *hilasterion*. It is the Greek word used to describe the mercy seat, the cover of the ark. Paul said Jesus' blood was sprinkled on the mercy seat of the ark in heaven. Jesus' blood



covers our sins so when God looks at us, he doesn't see our failure to keep his law. He sees the blood of his own son covering our sin. This is available to any of us by faith.

Our God is so good to us. Even though all of us have failed God, all of us have sinned against God, none of us have to experience God's wrath for our sins

like the Philistines or the men of Beth-Shemesh. When God looks down upon our sin, he doesn't see our sin, he sees the blood of his own son covering our sin once and for all. For that, we rejoice.



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