

THIS WEEK'S MESSAGE

SEPTEMBER 10TH, 2023 // 1 SAMUEL

SENDING THE ARK AWAY (1 SAMUEL 6:1-12) THEY HELD ON TO THE ARK FOR TOO LONG

Seven months after defeating the Israelites at Ebenezer, the trophy they had taken had now become a burden.

- They were reluctant to give it away, despite the repercussions, because of what it represented to them. If we are not careful, **our pride will keep us from seeing the futility of resisting God.**

SEEKING AN END TO THE AFFLICTIONS

The Philistines gathered their religious priests and diviners to figure out how they were to give the ark back.

- They were advised to send the ark back with a guilt offering. It does not seem as though this was an act of repentance but **an admission of sinning against Israel's God and a desire for the affliction to cease.**

GOLDEN TUMORS AND MICE

They were to make five gold tumors and five gold mice and send them back with the ark to

acknowledge that these judgments against them were from Israel's God.

- Though not every bad thing that happens to us is God judging us, **we cannot be so quick to dismiss afflictions and chalk them up to fate or bad luck.**

THEY KNEW THE STORIES OF THE ISRAELITES

The Philistine rulers were advised to **give glory to Israel's God and not harden their hearts like the Egyptians and Pharaoh did.**

- It's ironic that the "glory" (*chabod* in Hebrew) the Israelites refused to give to God by using the ark for their own purposes would be offered to Him by a pagan nation. **God will be glorified** (Isaiah 42:8).

GOD IS "FORCED" TO ACT

The Philistines thought these afflictions were from the God of Israel, but they wanted to be certain, so **they devised a test to be certain.**

- They thought they had "forced" God into doing something miraculous to prove He was the one afflicting them, but **God cannot be "forced" into anything. He wanted there to be no doubt about the origin of their afflictions.**

GOD IS ABOVE AND BEYOND THE LAWS OF NATURE

They were to take two milk cows that had never been yoked because **they would naturally resist the yoke and refuse to pull a cart.** Their calves were to be taken away and penned up because, **naturally, the milk cows would not leave their young calves behind.**

- **Their afflictions were not by chance but by the hand of a supernatural God.**

LESSONS FROM A COUPLE OF COWS

Verse 12 tells us that the cows went straight; they **"never strayed to the right or to the left."** They did not wander around but stayed on the path **"lowing as they went."**

- The lowing, or sound the cows made along the way, is mentioned to show a continuous bellowing. **They desired to be with their calves, yet they did the will of God.**

HE DISPLAYS HIS GREATNESS FOR ALL TO SEE

The Philistines confessed that the God of Israel was a mighty God, yet **they did not worship Him instead of their gods.**

- **Acknowledgment of God's majesty and might alone will not save us. A display of His greatness should move us to forsake the idols in our lives and submit fully to Him.**

THE ARK RETURNS (1 SAMUEL 6:13-7:1)

DIVINE APPOINTMENT

The destination of the cows was not by accident or chance. **Beth-Shemesh was one of the Levitical cities** in Israel where the people knew how to treat the ark—or at least they should have known how to treat the ark.

- The cart stopped beside a rock in the field of Joshua, so **they responded by offering the cart and cows to the Lord.**

CURIOSITY KILLED THE CAT... AND 70 PEOPLE

Though they violated Mosaic law by using a female animal for a burnt offering (Leviticus 1:3; 22:19) away from the Tabernacle (Deuteronomy 12:5-6), **they were struck down because they looked inside the ark of the Lord.**

- **No Israelite was ever to touch the outside of the ark—let alone open it.**

REMOVING THE TEMPTATION

Great lengths are taken to transport the ark with poles to avoid contact (Ex. 25:13-15; 37:5), so the first thing the Levites and priests of Beth-Shemesh should have done was to move the ark from view, removing the temptation.

- **God is not to blame for the consequences of our sin, especially when we have done nothing to remove the temptation.**

THE RIGHT QUESTION

The Israelites asked, **"Who is able to stand in the presence of the Lord this holy God?"** (v. 20) When the Israelites saw the results of their sin against a holy God, they viewed God as too harsh.

- They **"mourned because the Lord struck them"** (v. 19) and not because of their sin. In error, **we tend to focus on the consequences of sin instead of dealing with the sin.**

THE WRONG RESPONSE

Their response to not being able to stand in the presence of a holy God was to send the ark somewhere else.

- Instead of looking at their disobedience, they blamed God and put as much distance as possible between themselves and God. **God shows us His holiness and then invites us to share in His holiness** (Hebrews 12:10).

REMEMBRANCE (1 SAMUEL 7:2-17) MADE LOW TO LOOK UP

Israel had the ark for twenty years, and they were still no more right with God than when the ark was taken.

- Their cities were in ruin, their armies had been defeated, and the heavy yoke of the Philistines all culminated to finally bring them to a place where **"the whole house of Israel longed for the Lord"** (v. 2)

A CALL TO REPENT

Samuel called the nation to repentance. A genuine repentance would begin inwardly **"with all your heart"** and then lead to an outward action—**"get rid of the foreign gods"** (v. 3).

- **Experiencing conviction is good for nothing if there is not a tangible response. We must put away what is bad and pursue what is good.**

"SERVE HIM ONLY"

Baal and Ashtoreth were seductive idols in the culture. Baal was the god of weather, bringing crops and financial **success**, and Ashtoreth was the god of fertility, connected to **love and sex.**

- Israel's repentance and the **putting away of these idols would be difficult because it would fly in the face of the surrounding culture.**

SOLEMN ASSEMBLY AT MIZPAH

This time was different, and so were the results. Instead of rushing into battle and trying to manipulate God with the ark, the Israelites had Samuel cry out to the Lord on their behalf.

- **The Lord fought for them at Mizpah.** With a loud thunder, the Lord caused *great confusion* for the Philistines but gave *great confidence* to the Israelites.

HELP TO REMEMBER

The Israelites knew God had helped them thus far, and that gave them confidence that He would continue to help them. To never forget, **Samuel set up a stone monument called an Ebenezer** ("stone of help").

- **Remembering God's help in past situations gives us hope in future situations.**

LAMENTING & REPENTING

- Verse 7:2 says, **"All the house of Israel lamented after the Lord"** (KJV). To lament is the expression of deep regret, grief, or sorrow through words or actions.
- **Where do we take our lamentations?**
- **Do we lament over our sins against a Holy God? Do we abhor evil and pursue righteousness?**

REMEMBERING

- It is good for us to remember the victories in our lives that God has given to us.
- We must **"raise an Ebenezer"** to help us remember that **"the Lord has helped us to this point"** (v. 12). If we continue to seek Him first, **we can have hope that he will help us in the future, and that hope is what sustains our faith.**