

# FIRST SAMUEL

## Lesson 11: Chapter 6, The Ark is Returned to Israel

### A Lesson on God's Holiness

2 September 2016

**VSS. 1-2** After 7 months of trouble with the Ark of God, the Philistines look to their spiritual leaders for instruction on how they can safely send it back to "his place." They had rejoiced when they captured it, but now it's a hot potato that they don't want to hold onto anymore.

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**VSS. 3-5** The idolatrous spiritual leaders advise the Philistines to send the Ark of the God of Israel back with a trespass offering of five golden emerods and five golden mice for each government jurisdiction (see Joshua 13:3).

These pagans offered the golden emerods in testimony of their humiliation. They believed that by leaving this monument of their own shame and misery they might obtain pity from God, and freedom from their disease.

They offer the golden mice in hopes that God will lift the plague of mice from off the land when He sees that they acknowledge that He is the God who brought this plague.

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**VSS. 6-9** The Philistines decide to test whether it really is the God of Israel who brought the disease and the plague upon them. The test involves a situation where natural instincts of animals would have to be overridden by God—as proof that He's responsible.

They got two mother cows who had never been in a yoke before. They took their nursing calves away from them. They tied the cows to a cart carrying the Ark and the trespass offering. If the cows go straight to the Israelites without any difficulty, that will prove that the God of Israel sent the evil upon the Philistines and that it didn't just happen by chance.

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**VSS. 10-12** The cows went straight to Beth-shemesh without turning aside, proving that God was in control of the situation. God can cause any creature to act in ways that are not instinctive to them.

Notice that God has proven Himself to these Philistines more than once. He's trying to get them to discard their false idols (like Dagon) and false religion and look to Him. But instead, they are satisfied that they got rid of their problem and they return to their old idolatrous ways.

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**VSS. 13-18** The Israelites rejoiced and made sacrifice unto God when they got the ark back. The Philistines went back to Ekron when they saw that the ark was returned.

**VSS. 19-20** God smote 50,070 men of Beth-shemesh because some had looked into the ark of the LORD.

This is a great lesson on the holiness of God. God is holy and man is not holy. Here are some reasons that God judged these Israelites so severely:

1. The Israelites did not act in ignorance of God's commands. God gave detailed instructions to them about how to carry, transport, and protect the ark of the LORD. They chose to disregard all of this in direct disobedience to God's commands.
2. The infraction may appear to be small and unimportant, but we don't get to decide that. It's not the infraction itself that warrants the judgment; it's who the infraction was against that made it a serious offense.
  - a. **Adam and Eve:** eating fruit is not an offense. Disobeying God is the great offense. (Genesis 3:3)
  - b. **Nadab and Abihu:** burning a new recipe of incense is not evil. Disobeying God is. (Leviticus 10:1)
  - c. **Uzzah:** tried to prevent the ark from falling off the cart. His good intentions didn't override God's command not to touch it. (2 Samuel 6:7, 1 Chron. 13:10, Num. 4:15).
  - d. **David:** carrying the ark on a cart is not wicked. The Philistines did it and God used it. But David should have known better. God gave specific commandments about the method of transporting the ark (Exodus 25:14).
  - e. **Ananias and Sapphira:** saving some money for yourself is not sinful. Lying to God about it is a serious offense (Acts 5:3).

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**Who is able to stand before this holy Lord God?** (vs. 20). Certainly not sinful men.

1. The Philistines couldn't bear the presence of God's holiness. They sent it away. (1 Sam. 6:2)
2. The Israelites didn't want to be near it. It stayed in the house of Abinadab for 20 years (1 Sam. 7:2).
3. The Gadarenes didn't want to be near Jesus' holiness and sent Him away (Mark 5:17).
4. Peter struggled with the Lord's holiness (Luke 5:8).
5. No man can stand in God's presence and be confident in their own righteousness (Psalm 24:3-5, Psalm 15).
6. Jesus can! His hands are clean. His heart is pure. He can stand in God's presence—and He can stand on our behalf! In Christ, we can be righteous, we can be cleansed, we can be pure and true and faithful so that we can stand in God's presence on the day of Judgment.
  - a. Apart from Jesus Christ, no man has any hope of abiding the presence of God in His holiness.

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“What then is God's holiness? It is his utterly unique, divine essence. It determines all that He is and does. His holiness is what He is as GOD. Call it His majesty, —His divinity, —His greatness, —His value as the pearl of great price; in the END, language simply runs out.” John Piper

**Who is like unto thee, O LORD, among the gods? Who is like thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?** (Exodus 15:11)