

1 Sam 5:1-7:2 [10]-COMINGS & GOINGS of the ARK

INTRODUCTION. More tragedy has struck Israel – after two defeats and the death of Hophni and Phinehas, the godly prophet Eli has had an undignified death and the ark is captured by the Philistines. “*Ichabod*” has been pronounced!!

The Philistines were ‘chuffed’ at obtaining the ark and put it in the highest most prestigious place – beside **Dagon** their chief god! As a sport’s clubs put their trophies in the **Boardroom cabinet** on display to proudly boast of their successes!

Of course all pagans had a multiplicity of gods, so one more was nothing too spectacular – but obtaining, what they thought was Israel’s God, was something special! So great rejoicing!

However “*the next day behold Dagon had fallen face downward on the ground before the ark of the Lord*”[3]! This sort of thing never happened before! They were concerned! But “*they took Dagon and put him back in his place*”![3c] **APP** I wonder how they felt, lifting their ‘god’ from the ground and putting him back in his place? Some god!

Next morning, same thing happened – Dagon had fallen, lying “*before the ark of the Lord*”, but this time his “*head...both his hands were lying cut off on the threshold*”[4] That must have been pretty devastating to have your god ‘broken in pieces’! **Superstition** - avoid walking on the **threshold**![5] **APP** we in the west have our superstitions – **all** which had an **origin** in some ‘event’ which proved unfortunate. No 13, Under a ladder; Calendar up before end of year; Turn boat against the sun; Friday 13 May! ***All** who subscribe to such practices show their **unbelief** in **God’s** plan and order! It does **not mean** we do **foolish/risky** things like walking under a **shaky** ladder with **precariously** placed items which may fall on you, etc!!

What we must avoid is **disobedience** to God’s **revealed** will! Things that God has made known to be **sinful** and **wicked**,

things that are wrong and which He has **promised** to punish!

*“The hand of the Lord was **heavy against** the people of Ashdod and He terrified and afflicted them with **tumours** both Ashdod and its **territory**”*[6] **APP** It still happens, a territory, a region, is subjected to disaster upon disaster! And no one knows **why** – except **God!** We can be sure that God does **not** do it out of **pleasure** but has a reason. He is offended and warnings will have been ignored! Pagan nations **are** constantly grieving God!

His Law **is written** on their hearts. Paul says that when Gentiles (those without God’s revelation), when they sin *“their **conscience** also bears **witness**”*[Rom 2:15] In other words, they **know** they are doing wrong!! Of course there **some things** which they do, which they do **not know** is **wrong**, but they do **many** things which they know are really wrong! God deals with us **only** for the **knowledge** that we **do** have! Yet, God is **patient** with all of us! As with the **Amorites**, so it is true of us *“the **iniquity** of the **Amorites** is not yet complete”*[Gen 15:16].

Problem after problem came! God gave them **time** to **examine** the reason. **Remember 1988?** Zeebrugger + Kings Cross + M4 Air Disaster + IRA Bombs + American Cyclone + Ethiopian Drought, what next? Amos: *“I withheld the rain from you... I struck you with blight & mildew...I sent among you a pestilence ...**yet** you did **not return** to Me, declares the Lord”*[Amos 4] Sadly, neither did the UK! 20 year ago – God is still waiting!!

There is a **National Epidemic** of **tumours**!! Epidemics bring **panic**. And so it was here! There is a **National Emergency!** Remember **Food & Mouth!** Remember **AIDS!** All the **scientists** are called to find out where it **started?** Not one of their findings discovered where it really started! It started with **God!**

We must **commend** the Philistines – they believed it had a **spiritual connection!** *“The ark of God...must **not remain** with us”*[7] Of course because of their **lack** of **God’s** revelation

there was superstition ‘mixed-in’ with it, but still they **related faith** and **behaviour** to **consequences**!

The scientists of course had many suggestions. ‘We need to remove it to **Gath**’. But God “*afflicted the men of the city, both young and old, so that tumours broke out on **them***”[9]. Then they said, ‘Its near the coast, we better go inland to **Ekron**’! But the same judgment came upon them also! Note: “*the cry of the city went up to **heaven***”[12] Ie, God heard – and noted!

The Philistines now call for a **Special Council of Professional Experts**! “*called for the **priests and diviners** and said ‘What shall we do with the ark of the Lord?’*”[2] They call for the experts in **sociology** and **psychology** for an answer! This was like a **Global Crisis**! They had just what we had on Thursday a **G20 Summit** in London as it were! All the ‘heavies’ from around the world are called to solve the **Global Economic Crises** and the **Global Environmental Crisis**! Just as in Babylon in Daniel’s day “*none of the wise men*” could solve it!

APP Just as in this case here, there will be no solution to our economic and environmental ills, until we **acknowledge God**! The “*wisdom of the world*” will not solve God’s judgment. Of course, God raises up wise men and excellent leaders, but **no** one can oppose **God’s** hand! We cannot **thwart** God’s hand! God can make **fools** of the wise men of this world! **YK2** !? The millions of pounds that **each** nation spent on nothing!

So the ‘wise men’ they come up with a solution! ‘You mustn’t send it back **empty** – you must make a **guilt offering** to their God “*then you will be healed*”[3] You must have a **new cart** and make **images** of the tumours, and of mice, one for each of the five ‘lords’![5] They are now **worshipping** Israel’s God – at least they think they are “*give glory to the God of Israel. Perhaps he will lighten His hand from off you*”[5] **APP** Here is the world trying to please God and ‘do’ the right thing! But it can’t be done! The **heart** must be right in order to worship God

properly. There is such a thing as an **ignorant** worshipping of God - and it doesn't cut ice! There must be a **repentant** heart!

The Philistines even reason that worshipping Israel's God was the problem with Pharaoh and the Egyptians – they “**hardened their hearts**”[6] and refused to acknowledge Israel's God!

The carts must be driven by two milk cows, **separated** from their calves! If they cows take the carts back to Israel (Beth-Shemesh), then we know for sure it is their **God** who has sent this judgment. But if it goes in another direction, “*it has happened to us by coincidence*”[10]! *Davis=‘even city boys know that any cow in its right maternal mind, will return to its sucking calves’!! So the cows return to Israel (Beth-shemesh)!

Now we see another **tragedy**! This time to **Israelites**! When the ark returned, the “*Lord...struck seventy men of them...with a great blow*”[19] We might think is **very severe**! What did they do? They “*looked (studied, investigated) the ark of the Lord*” [19] This was **clearly forbidden**! (1) **Only** priests could go **near** the ark (2) Even priests were not allowed to **touch** the ark (3) Needed to **remove** a **nailed-down** covering (4) Needed to **lift the lid** (5) Forbidden to offer **female** cattle [14] **APP** Although you and I might not be aware of these **prohibitions**, **they** knew them very well. **No excuses** for them! Yes, maybe the Philistines removed some of the covering and left it in **disrepair** and therefore it was ‘easier’ and more ‘natural’ for them to ‘inspect’ it - but God's law stands!

God is “*no respecter of persons*”[Acts 10:34] Whether you are an Israelite/Philistine/**Xn** “*the wrongdoer will be paid back for the wrong he has done, and there is no partiality*”[3:25]! *Also God **does expect more** from His people, those with ‘light’, than He does from the ‘world’! **Accountability**! The Big Lesson – when things go wrong and there is judgment – we need to **walk softly** and **humbly**! *Need to **examine** our **hearts** and to **examine** our **real relationship** to God!