

Title: Sovereign and Holy God

Scripture: 1 Samuel 6

Series: God, the True King

1. Introduction:

- a. When we last studied the book of 1 Samuel, we encounter the self-sufficient God that fought His own battles and brought glory to His own name.
- b. God's presence wages war and defeats Dagon, the false God. God then goes throughout Philistia and decimates the people. God, while pouring out His justice, is also being a God of Grace. He is revealing himself to both the pagan and chosen nation.
- c. Today, we consider further how God is revealing Himself as being both Sovereign and Holy. Our story continues with the severe judgment of Philistia and we are now introduced to the chastisement of His people.
- d. We learn that not to hallow God is to incur divine judgment.

2. Verses 1 and 2: The Holy Presence of God: The Ark of the LORD was in the country of the Philistines seven months. (2) 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."

- a. Our passage tells us that the Ark of the Lord stayed in Philistia for seven months, and it was the longest seven months the Philistines had ever endured. God's judgment was complete.

- b. During that period, the Philistine people were afflicted by the hand of God as they stubbornly refused to surrender the Ark. If you remember, a great majority of the Philistines were killed, and some were struck with tumors. God's hand had been heavy indeed.
- c. After having moved the Ark throughout Philistia, the Philistines have finally come to a dire realization. They must send the Ark of God back to where it came from, or they shall perish. The Philistines are ready to admit both a religious and political defeat.
 - i. This was no small thing. To send the Ark back meant that the Philistines and Dagon had been conquered.
 - 1. However, having run out of options, the priests and the people of Philistia are ready to flee before the presence of God. They are ready to have God leave their midst because the holiness of God is too much to bear.
 - 2. This attitude is common. Before the holiness of God, sinful men must flee. In the presence of God, the saints tremble, but the sinner is terrorized.
 - a. **Luke 5:8** But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord."
 - b. The Philistines want God far from them. Their sin makes it impossible to stand before God.

d. Beloved, what happened in Philistia will one day befall all the pagan nations. They, too, will experience the awesome hand of God's judgment and will try to run from the divine presence:

- i. **Revelation 6:15-17** Then the kings of the earth and the great ones and the generals and the rich and the powerful, and everyone, slave and free, hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains, (16) calling to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb, (17) for the great day of their wrath has come, and **who can stand?**"

3. Verses 3-5: Sinners are Guilty before God: 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." (4) 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. (5) 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.

- a. The religious leaders warn them not to send the Ark away empty-handed. They purpose to send a **Guilt**

(trespass)-offering along with the Ark. The gifts appointed were to serve as compensation and satisfaction to be rendered to the God of Israel for the robbery committed upon Him by the capture of the Ark.

- i. By including this offering, they were admitting something about themselves. They were guilty. They were sinners. They had transgressed and had rightfully incurred the wrath of God.
- b. But in their hurry to find relief from judgment, these pagan people decided to seek forgiveness based on their own thinking.
 - i. However, we must notice the foolishness of such actions. As if God could be bought with gold! As if images could appease the judgment of God!
 - ii. Many people want to seek peace with God but only on their terms. This does not work. The offending party must surrender to the offended party's mercy
 - iii. If the Philistines desire forgiveness, they must come to God the prescribed way. They must offer their sacrifices according to what has been revealed.
 - iv. Remember, the Philistines, like all of humanity, are guilty of gross sin against God. The guilty cannot dictate terms. The conquered cannot have any conditions for surrender.
- c. So what is the prescribed way? Beloved, the only way that we can be forgiven our trespasses against God is to come through the sacrifice of His Son.

i. There is only one way to the Father, and His name is Jesus Christ.

1. Any other way is false, and the trespass remains.

4. Verse 6: the Nations are Impotent before God: 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?

a. The Philistines, at this point, are reminded that the situation they find themselves in is nothing new. They recall that a mightier nation than theirs had tried to defy the God of Israel before and had been decimated. They recall the fall of Egypt.

b. This sobering thought prompts them to surrender. Egypt and their multitudes of gods had been impotent to fight against the true God. The Philistines and their god find themselves living this same truth. They are also completely impotent. The truth of the matter is simple. All nations are impotent before the God of our salvation. To fight against God and live contrary to the truth is irrational.

i. **Psalms 2:1-5** Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? (2) The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD and against his Anointed, saying, (3) “Let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us.” (4) He who sits in the heavens laughs; the Lord holds them in derision.

(5) Then he will speak to them in his wrath, and terrify them in his fury, saying,

5. Verses 7-12: The Nations Will Acknowledge the Sovereignty of God: 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. (8) 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 (9) 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.” (10) The men did so, and took two milk cows and yoked them to the cart and shut up their calves at home. (11) And they put the Ark of the LORD on the cart and the box with the golden mice and the images of their tumors. (12) 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.

- a. The thought here was that If the cart went toward Beth-shemesh, that would be a sure sign for the Philistines that the Lord had brought the disaster upon them. Why? Under normal circumstances, no one expected the cows, contrary to nature, to go walking off toward Israel and abandon their calves.

- i. If the cows went straight towards Israel, the Philistines would know that the invisible hand of God had to lead them. They would also know that the God of the Bible was the supreme Sovereign God.
 - ii. If the cows did what was appropriate to their nature and went home towards their calves, the Philistines would know that what had happened was a coincidence.
 - iii. Beloved, there are no coincidences in the kingdom of God. His Sovereignty reigns over all the universe. Our God is in the heavens, and He does whatever He pleases.
- b. Beloved, how sovereign is God? In this passage, He speaks not through any prophet but ordinary cows! Through these cows, God reveals to them sufficient truth.
- i. **Commentary:** The Philistines were responsible for rightly responding to the truth they received. God had stooped to show them, in terms they could understand, that He had destroyed their god, their land, and their bodies. Now, what will they do with this revelation?
 1. Should they not turn and at least begin to serve or fear this real and living God? Or will they go back to Philistia and take Dagon and continue to worship their broken god?
 2. Like many people today, once the pain of revelation is gone, the fear is alleviated, but the

head is no wiser, our hearts no softer than before. The Philistines choose to continue in their idolatry.

- c. **A note about Grace:** If the Lord stoops to reveal himself even to the enemies of Israel, to this noncovennat people, we can infer that God is reaching out to the enemies of His people today!
6. Verses 13-18: The People of God Must Worship God:
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. (14) 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. (15) 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. (16) And when the five lords of the Philistines saw it, they returned that day to Ekron. (17) 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, (18) and the golden mice, according to the number of all the cities of the Philistines belonging to the five lords, both fortified cities and unwalled 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.

- a. When the cart arrived in Israel, the people of God are surprised.
 - b. How is it that the Ark of the Lord has found its way back to Israel?
 - i. What they had assumed was lost permanently, by grace, has now been regiven to them. What will they do with such an incredible display of grace.
 - c. The people immediately set their hearts to worship. They must offer a thanksgiving offering to the Lord.
7. Verses 19-21: The People of God Must Hollow God: 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. (20) 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?” (21) 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.”
- a. The men of Beth-shemesh were struck down for an act of sacrilege. The handling of what is holy as if it is something common.
 - b. They had inspected the Ark without it being covered or had even gone far enough to open the Ark to see what was inside. This was a violation of the word of God:

- i. **Numbers 4:5-6** When the camp is to set out, Aaron and his sons shall go in and take down the veil of the screen and cover the Ark of the testimony with it. (6) Then they shall put on it a covering of goatskin and spread on top of that a cloth all of blue, and shall put in its poles.
- ii. **Numbers 4:20** but they shall not go in to look on the holy things even for a moment, lest they die.”
- c. Beloved we don't know how the Philistines handled the Ark of God. But we do know that they were pagans without the Lord's written Law
 - i. Israel, however, had the Law and therefore was held accountable for their trespass. To whom much is given, much will be required.
 - 1. Beloved, God expects more from us than the unrepentant. Because He has revealed Himself so wonderfully through the Son, we must approach Him for who He is; Holy!
- d. Beloved, look at how the people of God dealt with the death of their men.
 - i. They ask, **“Who can stand before the Lord, this holy God?”** This is an excellent question to ponder.
 - 1. The answer to this question is, “no one!” there is no person, who on the basis of his own goodness, can ever stand before God. Man is sinful, and God is holy.
 - a. If we are going to stand in the presence of God at all, we must stand before Him in the justification of another, someone better than

us. We must stand before Him covered in the holy obedience of Jesus Christ the Savior.

ii. The second question by these men demonstrates an utter failure in comprehension and humility. They ask, “**And to whom shall He go up away from us?**”

1. This question shows that the men of Beth-Shemesh were unwilling to self-reflect and take responsibility for their trespass. Instead, it is easier for them to remove God from their lives and not fear His holiness.

2. **Commentary:** Our culture does not help us to smash our graven image of the casual God. Our culture proclaims that God must be the essence of tolerance; he is chummy rather than holy, the “man upstairs” rather than my Father for Jesus’ sake. So long as our bumper stickers declare that “God is my co-pilot,” we can be sure that we have not yet seen the King, the Lord of Host. As Jonathan Edwards noted, it is the absence of “godly fear” that signifies a lack of the knowledge of God.”

iii. Beloved, it is dangerous to be in the presence of God, but we must not want Him to go from us. We stand in that Holy place by the sacrifice and substitution of King Jesus. Because of Him, we can call God Father and yet still tremble at the same time.

e. Finally, dear ones, our passage shows us that God will not excuse his people's irreverent spirit. God's steadfast love for His people does not compromise the justice of God's judgment. If God will be hallowed among the nations, His people must hallow Him even more.

8. Benediction:

a. **1 Peter 1:15-16** but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, (16) since it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy."

Public Reading of Scripture
Psalms 99