

WHO IS ABLE TO STAND BEFORE THIS HOLY LORD GOD?

I Samuel 6:1-21

Introduction:

- The Ark is returned to Israel, after 7 months
 - But, not before God teaches the Philistines another lesson, and the people of Israel also
- I. **THE ARK IS RETURNED TO ISRAEL-** v. 1-12
- a. V. 1- Why did they keep it seven months at all? Maybe because they were reluctant to give up such a wonderful “trophy
 - b. (1Sa 6:1-6) Send the Ark back...but how?
 - c. The priests of the Philistines suggest a way to relieve themselves of the “burden” of the ark.
 - i. The Philistines finally started to recognize that it was God who had plagued them and judged them. They recognized that they had offended God and must appease him with a symbol of sorrow and repentance, so they gave what’s called here a trespass offering. Interestingly, the offering pictured their plagues!
V. 4-5
 - ii. V. 5- And you shall give glory to the God of Israel: Acknowledging God’s judgment is one way to give glory to the God of Israel
 - iii. V.3, 5- Perhaps He will lighten His hand from you, from your gods, and from your land: The Philistines admitted that God’s hand was upon them- It was a triple threat- their bodies, their gods, and their land
 - iv. Note: Lift His hand...from your gods- They acknowledged that God was victorious, yet they still clung to their gods.
 - d. (1Sa 6:7-9) The Philistines decide how to return the ark, including a test to see if the judgment was from God or by chance. This shows that they thought the plagues were from God, but they were not 100% sure, so they conducted a little experiment.

- e. As David Guzik explains in his commentary, The test was simple, and stacked against God. By nature, two milk cows which have never been yoked or trained should not pull a cart at all, instead they should have resisted their yokes. Additionally, they decided to take their young calves back home, away from them. The “maternal instinct” of the cows would draw them not towards the land of Israel, but back home to their own calves. The Philistines devised a test that “forced” the God of Israel to do something miraculous to demonstrate He really was the cause of the plagues.
 - i. God never wanted the ark to be transported by a cart. He wanted it to be carried by poles set in rings on the side of the ark (Numbers 4:15).
 - ii. Though this way of transporting the ark was prohibited by the Law, God excused them because of their ignorance of His law. They didn’t know any better, and there were no Levites around to carry it back.
 - iii. As opposed to the men of Bethshemeh in v. 19, and the story in II Samuel 6:7- Uzzah- who did know better!
- f. God didn’t leave this up to chance! This was a remarkable miracle. Two cows who never pulled a cart before, no driver led them, yet they left home, and marched the ten miles or so to a city they had never been to. They went straight on a certain road, never made a wrong turn, and never stopped. All of this by chance?
- g. What does chance mean? It means that it is something which happens without being foreseen or intended. Nothing happens unforeseen by God who rules over all (sovereignty). All chance is “direction which you cannot see;” but though we do not see it the direction was there nonetheless.

II. **THE ARK AT BETHSHEMESH-** v. 13-15

- a. The glory of the Lord had departed, but God reveals his glory using a pair of cows!
- b. V. 16- The Philistines personally observed to see if God would indeed meet the test. Their reaction isn’t recorded, but they must have been persuaded.
- c. The Levites take down the ark and make a sacrifice unto God
- d. V. 19- God strikes the men of Bethshemesh, because they had looked into the ark of the Lord: The Ark was only to be touched and handled by specific Levites from the family of Kohath, and even they were commanded to not touch the ark itself (Numbers 4:15). Then, only the High Priest could come before the Ark, and only once a year! The men of Bethshemesh sinned by not only touching the ark, but also looking inside of it

- i. We again see an important principle that God dealt with Israel more strictly than He did with the Philistines. They handled and transported the ark wrong, but at least they did not try and look inside. The Israelites, who had the Law, should have known better! So they faced a stronger punishment
- ii. Luke 12:48, "...For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required"
- iii. Illustr- Jesus' proclamation against Capernaum (Matthew 11:20-24) Degrees of judgment in Hell
- iv. Sinners who reject truth, but application for Christians is that we face a stronger chastisement because we are held to a higher standard!
- e. V. 21- They sent messengers to the inhabitants of Kirjath Jearim: We don't know why they picked this village. Perhaps they had good relations with these men and thought they would take good care of the ark. Whatever the reason, the men of Kirjath Jearim received the ark and it stayed there for many years until King David brought it to Jerusalem (2 Samuel 6).

III. **THE HOLINESS OF GOD**- v. 19-20

- a. V. 20-The people cried out, "who is able to stand before this holy Lord God?" In their disrespect for God, the men of Beth Shemesh offended the holiness of the Lord
- b. The Israelites who looked in the ark were actually violating several laws: they came near to the ark, they looked at the ark, they touched the ark and they moved the atonement cover, which was God's symbolic throne. Since God's presence was on/over the ark, they were actually coming into the presence of God - and without the least sense of reverence towards him, since they decided to poke around and play with his throne!
 - i. Holiness is primarily the fact that God is separate, different from His creation
 - ii. He is the thrice holy God that is high and lifted up in Isaiah 6!
 - iii. When men encounter the holiness of God, they are not necessarily attracted to it. When Peter saw the holy power of Jesus he said, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!" (Luke 5:8). When the disciples on another occasion saw the holy Jesus shining forth at the transfiguration, they were greatly afraid (Matthew 17:6).

- iv. Though God is holy, though He is apart from us, in this dispensation God calls us to come to Him and share His holiness (Heb. 12:10 partakers of his holiness). As it says in 1 Peter 1:16, God calls us to be holy, for I am holy.
- v. For many the holiness of God is a problem so they try and distance themselves as much as possible like these men here v. 21
- vi. Holiness demands cleansing and purging sometimes
- c. V. 20- who is able to stand? See Psalm 24:3-4- pure inward man, pure outward man
- d. Who can stand? Only Christ- and those who are in Him!

Conclusion:

- Fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom
- God is not the graven image our culture worships of a chummy, easy going man upstairs who is tolerant of all.
- God's presence ought to make us draw near, not run away! But it also should make us tremble at the same time!
- The Israelites when they were travelling in the wilderness had attempted to live with the Lord visibly present in their midst; but, in the end, out of all the thousands who had so gladly fled Egypt, only two survived God's Presence
- This does not mean there is no intimacy with God- we do call Him "Father" but we must not get too familiar or casual with God where we no longer marvel at His holiness.