

# 1 Samuel 6:1-7:1

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[ 0 : 0 0 ]     Again, that's 1 Samuel 6-1 through 7-1 on page 217 of the Pew Bibles. Please stand for the reading of God's Word. The Ark of the Lord was in the country of the Philistines seven months.

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 shall we send it to its place? 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. 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.

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.

[ 1 : 1 0 ]     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? 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. 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, 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. The men did so and took two milk cows and yoked them to the cart and shut up their calves at home.

And they put the Ark of the Lord on the cart, and the box with the golden mice and the images of their tumors. And the cows went straight in the direction of Beth Shemesh, along one highway, lowing as they went.

[ 2 : 1 9 ]     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. Now the people of Beth Shemesh were reaping their wheat harvest in the valley.

When they lifted up their eyes and saw the Ark, they rejoiced to see it. 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.

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.

And when the five lords of the Philistines saw it, they returned that day to Ekron. 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, and one for Ekron.

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 besides which they set down the Ark of the Lord is a witness to this day in the field of Joshua of Beth Shemesh.

[ 3 : 36 ] And he struck some of the men of Beth Shemesh because they looked upon the Ark of the Lord. He struck 70 men of them, and the people mourned because the Lord had struck the people with a great blow.

Then the men of Beth Shemesh said, Who is able to stand before the Lord, this holy God? And to whom shall we go up away from us? So they sent messengers to the inhabitants of Kiriath-Jerim, saying, The Philistines have returned the Ark of the Lord.

Come down and take it up to you. And the men of Kiriath-Jerim came and took up the Ark of the Lord and brought it to the house of Abinadab on the hill. And they consecrated his son Eleazar to have charge of the Ark of the Lord.

From the day that the Ark was lodged at Kiriath-Jerim, a long time past, some twenty years, and all the house of Israel lamented after the Lord. This is the word of the Lord.

Thank you, God. Well, welcome to one of the wildest chapters in all the Bible.

[ 4 : 43 ] And nowhere in the scriptures do we find ourselves to be so distant from the text as one like this.

Yet as far away as we are from this incredible scene of superstitious gold tumors being fashioned even in the shape of mice and carried along a road.

Even here we find questions that are contemporary and that we can say of ourselves, their questions are mine.

I want you to see how the narrator first throws questions at the beginning of the text and the end of the text. And the question simply is, what in the world are we going to do with God?

And that question seems to be the same whether you were a Philistine or whether you were an Israelite. What are we to do with God?

[ 5 : 57 ] Take a look at the striking similarity between the questions that the Philistines asked. Chapter 6, verse 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 shall we send it to its place? The Israelites' set of questions are at the end of the chapter. Chapter 6 and verse 20.

Turn over and take a look at it there. 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?

It doesn't matter whether you're a Philistine in the text or an Israelite. Your question is the same. What are we to do with God? Or, more particularly, Where can we put him and be safe from him?

Those are contemporary questions. Even though the narration of the text seemed so distant from us.

[ 7 : 08 ] Let's take a look at the Philistines. Their questions were rising because of the recent ruin that the presence of the ark of the Lord had brought upon them.

We saw it last week in chapter 5. The presence of the ark in the cities of the Philistines is shown to be a source of unforeseen trouble, affliction, tumors, destruction of their food source, and perhaps even death.

Do you remember the word that we saw last week? The hand of the Lord had been heavy upon them.

That's where their question is rising from. What are we to do with God? To where can I send Him? For His hand has been heavy upon us.

Take a look at chapter 5. We saw it there most clearly in verse 9. They brought it around and the hand of the Lord was against that city.

[ 8 : 27 ] We saw it earlier in verse 4 that the hand of the Lord was heavy against the people of Ashdod. We see it in verse 11 where the hand of God was heavy there.

What are we going to do with God? He says, My life is a mess. And He's the source or the reason for it all. Now, the story we already know was humorously told, wasn't it?

For at the beginning of this narration, they were thrilled with their purported victory over Israel and had brought that ark into their own temple into the house of Dagon.

And yet in the midst of the presence of Dagon, from when they closed the door at night and came back in the morning, their God had one day fallen over on His face in the presence of the ark to which all the priests gathered round and lifted Him up and set Him back on His stand only to come back the next day and not only was Dagon fallen before the ark of the Lord, but His head had been cut off as were His arms or His hands.

Their God had no hands. He was impotent before the ark of God. It made me think of a recent trip I made to the city of Toronto.

[ 10 : 02 ] Great city. And there's a church right downtown that has a bit of history. With Chicago, in fact, A.W. Tozer, mid-20th century preacher on Chicago's south side, labored in our vicinity with the Christian Missionary Alliance until his elder years, and he was called to a church downtown Toronto.

And he went and preached there and filled his church. I've been in it. A balcony that wraps all the way around. What must have been a great place for preaching the Word of God at the center.

And so here was this great 20th century preacher in the heart of Toronto who, upon his death and in subsequent years, that congregation moved out of Center City and sold their building unbeknownst to them to Hare Krishna, which we had a celebration of the God this past week.

So when I visited A.W. Tozer's church and walked in to see what I thought would be the place of his fervent biblical mystery, what did I find?

As you come in the back, all the pews have been removed. And in the front are three enormous deities.

[ 11 : 37 ] And if you know anything about Hare Krishna, they are painted ladies. They are vibrantly painted in blood orange and in red and in purple.

Three deities, the tallest in the middle, probably 12 to 13 feet high. On the back wall is water trickling and running and in their presence are people without shoes sprawled out on the floor.

I walked to the front. I stood before the first deity and suddenly I wanted to laugh. Not out of disrespect for the people or the place, but before the deities, they had installed steel bars that were locked with a key lock.

They looked, in fact, all three deities, as if they were in large circus cages. And then it hit me.

the deities were locked not because the people feared the power of the gods getting out.

[ 12 : 57 ] The deities were locked so that the vagrants and the homeless of Toronto wouldn't get in and desecrate them.

And it all became clear to me. In the illustration of Dagon in similar fashion, this purportedly potent God, at the end of the day, impotent, for he was nothing other than a creation of those who put him there to begin with.

But not so with the God of Israel. There are no bars from which he can be held.

And the question that the Philistines are asking at the opening of the chapter is because his hand has been so heavy against us, what are we to do with him and where can we send him?

The answer is given to you in the narration. And here it is. getting rid of God is what ultimately brings the Philistines a sense of relief in life.

[ 14 : 20 ] Getting rid of God will bring relief in life. well there's a lot to see as that unfolds.

The sending away of the ark is on the lips of every decent Philistine in the text.

All the people are gathering and going to the priests and to the diviners. it almost reminded me of that little moment in John's gospel chapter 11 where they, that is the religious leaders, say of Jesus, what are we to do with this man?

But here of course the relief came through the instructions of their priests and their diviners.

The religious leaders told them what to do and it involved the giving of a guilt offering which was forming out of gold the judgments that had come upon so many of their people in the shape of tumors.

[ 15 : 36 ] I mean this is not the gold earrings you're going to want to pick up on 53rd Street in one of the jewelry shops. I love your earrings.

What are they symbolizing? Well these are gold tumors, you know. But so it was. If he had inflicted us with tumors, let's give him some gold in tumors and maybe he'll let us go.

And evidently he had also inflicted their fields with mice. And so they fashioned from gold mice, they place them all in a little box, they set it next to this ark that at one time they thought they had control over and now need to get rid of.

They yoke the box and the ark to a cart pulled by two milk cows who had never been under the yoke before. And the superstitious ways are simply this.

If the God of Israel is responsible for the mess in our life, these things are going to go straight back to where they came from. Now if they just wander around, then we don't have to worry about this God anymore.

[ 16 : 46 ] And so the cows go. The phrase even, they were lowing as they went.

According to the map in the back of my Bible, the distance between where the ark was in Ekron and where they wanted to send it in Beth Shemesh is about ten miles as the crow flies.

And evidently they sent not a scout team but a rear guard team to determine where they actually went. And there the cows went straight all the way to Beth Shemesh.

So that when you get to verse 16 you see the relief has finally come. And when the five lords of the Philistines saw it they returned that day to Ekron.

what are you going to do with God? Where are you going to send him?

[ 18 : 01 ] Are you one like the Philistines who might begin to think my life would be a heck of a lot better if I put it all in the rear view mirror?

hasn't been there for me anyway. I can count to all kinds of times when I looked for him and only received the worst that life had to give.

I know of many today friends in this season fortunately not family and others who want relief from God.

They just want him to go away. In fact they're grateful that they live in this day and not in the day of our text.

Think about the differences between the day of our text and our own. We live in a different day. There is no visible object in our midst that plays such a direct role in mediating judgments out as did the ark in that day.

[ 19 : 27 ] This is a great day. If you don't want to deal with God. There is no apparent sign that he is just around the corner of wrath waiting to leap on you.

Can't find him. He's not here. And what a relief that is for many. have have you ever thought of what this must be like?

Just think of the contemporary indication implication. This is the kind of life, this Philistine life, this is the kind of life that many of us would prefer to live if we were able to create the terms on our own.

God, you leave me alone. I'll be glad to leave you alone. You go your way, I'll go mine.

You're cool with me? I'm cool with you. Relief in life comes for many by getting rid of God.

[ 20 : 50 ] What about the Israelites? This life of mutual indifference evidently wasn't an option.

I mean, if you were born into the family of God, not so easy to do away with God. What happens to the Israelites in our text is interesting.

The Ark is making its way back. it brings two responses and two questions.

Look at the response. You see it as they turned along the border and in verse 13, the people of Beth Shemesh were reaping the wheat harvest in the valley and when they lifted up their eyes and saw the ark, what?

They rejoiced to see it. So for one group of people in the world, getting rid of God will bring relief to live as you like.

[ 21 : 54 ] But for the Israelite, receiving God was immediately attached to this word, rejoicing. Now this is an astounding word given the context because in chapter 4 that ark had not protected them in battle on the day that they called upon it.

They were familiar that the power of God had an impartiality to it. And yet, this is the heart of any who would seek God even today.

Knowing what you know, if he were to come in a straight line, lowing as he went, you would say, this is something to be rejoiced in.

God present in the world, in my world. Yet, that wasn't the only response. For verse 19 tells us this big deflating verse that even in their rejoicing, even in their sacrificing, the God of Israel struck some of the men of Beth Shemesh because they looked upon the ark of the Lord.

Now, you don't get any indication in the text of what that actually is to mean. They must have looked upon the ark of the Lord in some way that they should not have looked upon the ark of the Lord, although we do not know what that would be.

[ 23 : 32 ] And then you have a real textual problem here in verse 19. He struck 70 men of them, literally in the Hebrew, 70, 50,000 men.

Not sure what to do with it, other than to say that by the word struck, we are aware in the text and the way that word is used, it is different than this plagues that struck the Philistines when God's hand was heavy upon them.

For God to strike someone was to kill them. They lost a number of men. God comes back, rejoice, many die.

Second response, well it's right there in the text, the people mourned because the Lord had struck the people with a great blow.

And so those who wanted God back in their lives received Him with fear, with fear, with fear that was attached to their joy.

[ 24 : 43 ] Joyous fear. That is the mark of any who would receive God into their life.

Joyous fear. fear. Relief if you just want to send Him away. Joyous fear if you want Him to draw near.

They asked the question. Notice how they personify it at the end of chapter 6. No longer are we talking about the ark of the Lord. The ark is equated with God Himself.

Look at the nature of their questions. Who is able to stand before the Lord, this holy God? And to whom shall He go up? Not the ark go up.

To whom shall He go up away from us? And so they send Him on the way. For even those who want God don't want to dwell too close to God.

[ 25 : 51 ] They send Him to Kiriath Jerim, which is a little journey, a little bit to their north, a little bit further to their east. It's actually directionally the nearest sort of town that the Israelites would have called their own rather than the Philistine country.

And it's the town which you would have normally gone to if the ark were going to make its eventual journey all the way back to Shiloh where it first started. And so they're sending Him down the line.

And when it comes to Kiriath Jerim, they take the son of the man who's the owner of the field and they consecrate him as a priest.

For back in Moses' day, the only way God's people could dwell in the presence of God and live with God was through this mediating force.

And that mediating force had died with the deaths of Eli's son. So God finally comes to rest in His return and in the elevation of a mediator and the bloodshed stops.

[ 27 : 07 ] Now what are we to make of it today? Well, is God really as distant as we think He might be?

We seem to think that God doesn't work now as He did then. And in true, in many senses, this is the case. But if you've never considered the Christian message, I want you to know the substance of it in this way today.

that God is not absent, although He is now awake. He has come into the presence of the world and tabernacled in our midst through the eternal Word, now made flesh, Jesus, the Nazarene.

God's name. And this one is the witness or the Word of God, indeed, the testimony in the olden days in which the ark was its carrier.

God's Savior. And that Jesus comes to mediate this distance between us and in His death pays for our inability to live with God or, put more properly according to this text, for God's inability to live with us.

[ 28 : 54 ] He won't live with us as we are until Jesus becomes a substitute for us and in the shedding of His blood and in His death and in His resurrection, victory over this impaired relationship is established once and for all.

so that when Mark writes his own gospel account with Jesus on the cross breathing His last, he articulates that at that moment in Jerusalem in the temple to the Holy of Holies, the curtain that separated where the ark would be from where the people could be was torn from top to bottom.

so that in Jesus this inability to get near to God has now been done away with. So if you want to do something with God today, your choice is clear.

simply walk from these doors, get rid of him, and you will have temporary relief from him.

Or, come to Jesus believing that he is the mediator between you and this distance, and receive him with fearful joy, not merely joy.

[ 30 : 36 ] His word, his ways, move in your life through the power of his spirit.

God will do you? So what will you do? The choice is simple. Put him on a cart, never come back, and have relief until you see him face to face.

for just as the ark returned to the people of God in this day, so too the ark of the covenant, according to John's apocalypse in chapter 11, at the end of the day, when all the peals of thunder come, the curtain will be pulled back, and the ark of God will be seen, and at that day, he will mediate out all justice, and it will be far worse than tumors or mice.

It will be, according to the scriptures, everlasting separation from God in what we call hell. God will do away with you, or God will draw you near, and he will do both through his son.

So, we come full circle. What are you going to do with God? You want relief?

[ 32 : 24 ] You'll get it for a while. You want to receive him? Do it with joy and fear.

God for this God is like no other God. Our Heavenly Father, this arcane, ancient story filled with the texture of superstition and desire, has shown us one thing, that your power, your glory, your authority is over all.

Whether we be Philistine or Israelite, Jew or Gentile, black or white, Asian or Hispanic, you are the creator of the heavens and the earth.

Help us in Christ to know what to do with you. We pray it to your glory. In Jesus' name, Amen.