

**Message #14****I Samuel 6:10-21**

Last Sunday was Father's Day. It reminds me of a story I know. There was a church that decided to come up with a gimmick to bring in more people. What they decided to do was to have the people in their church invite their fathers and grandfathers to come to a service so they could be honored. Now some of the fathers and grandfathers would have to miss their own service and their own church to participate. One father, who was part of a church that was very devoted to the Scriptures, said, "I am not going." His view was, I am not about to go to a church to honor me when I can stay in a church that honors the word of God.

Now there is nothing wrong with honoring fathers and grandfathers. But you have to admire a man who so reverences God and His word that he says Sunday is not about me and the kids, it is about God. That point, most people don't understand. Israel sure did not understand it and neither do most that go to church.

There is that story in Acts 20 when Paul was teaching for hours in Troas and a young man named Eutychus fell asleep and fell out of a 3<sup>rd</sup> story window and died. Paul paused, went down and healed him and everyone went back to listening to the word of God (Acts 20:8-12). You would have thought they would have focused on the dead boy brought back to life; instead they focused on the word of God. Most can't relate to that. Most cannot relate to that kind of commitment to God's word.

But God's people need to know that God and His word are to be revered and magnified and if that isn't happening, there will be serious negative consequences.

The Philistines were sick of having the word of God in their cities. They wanted to get rid of it. So they came up with a plan to send the ark back to Israel. Even though Israel will be happy about this, it doesn't mean they really reverence God and His word.

**WHEN GOD BRINGS HIS WORD TO HIS PEOPLE, HE EXPECTS HIS PEOPLE TO REVERENCE HIM AND HIS WORD AND IF THEY DON'T, THERE WILL BE SERIOUS CONSEQUENCES.**

God's people need to know that if they have and know God's word, they are far more accountable than those who do not have it or know it.

God is a holy God. There is no one like Him. He is set apart in majestic holiness and when He deems something as sacred, if you tamper with it, you will answer to God.

Last time we saw that, the Philistines wanted to get rid of the ark so they set up a plan to do so.

There are three parts to this:

**PART #1** – The plan of the Philistines. **6:10-12**

The Philistines were desperate to get rid of the ark because it was causing them great problems. They decided that they would follow the advice of the priests and diviners.

According to **verse 10**, the men locked up the calves of the cows and hitched the cows to the cart. Now keep in mind what they think. They think if the cows leave their calves and head out away from their calves, then this is all from God.

Let's face it; if the cows took off away from their babies, it would be amazing. Most mother cows want to be very near their calves and if you get between a calf and its mother, you are in a very dangerous situation.

According to **verse 11**, the men put the ark of the LORD on the cart and the box that contained their golden mice and golden tumors. In order to get the ark onto the cart, they had to touch it and lift it.

This is the very same ark that when God's people touch it, they die (Num. 4:19-20; II Sam. 6:1-7). The Philistines have no idea as to how sacred this really is. After all they had hauled it around their territory and nothing seemed to happen. They are just doing what they think they ought to do.

There is more culpability to one who knows the word of God. Those who know the word of God and refuse to obey the word of God are far more accountable than those who don't. When you are the people of God and you know the word of God, you are more accountable to God.

Let me illustrate the point. There was a man who was unsaved who had an affair with a woman. He eventually got saved and the church welcomed him. In the same church was a man who did the same thing and they put him out of the church.

There is a difference between those outside the family and those inside the family. In fact, it was Paul who said don't judge those outside, but those inside the family for they are more accountable to God (I Cor. 5:12).

God permits the lost world to seem to get away with things that He would never let His own people. Those who know the Lord and know the word are highly accountable.

**Verse 12** says that when they let the cows go, they headed "straight" toward Beth-shemesh. As John Woodhouse said, they took a straight route "as though they were on a highway" (*I Samuel*, p. 117).

As they went they were “lowing,” which means they were crying out (William Gesenius, *Hebrew Lexicon*, p. 176). They were crying out because they were missing their calves. This shows the sovereignty of God in this; they are missing their calves, but they continue to walk away from their calves and did not turn toward them. Their desire is to turn to their calves, but God is overruling their desire and He is directing their paths. In fact, to the Philistines this was their test and it proved this was from God.

The cows started walking toward Beth-shemesh. Beth-shemesh was a priestly city that had been given to Aaron and his sons (Joshua 21:13-16). This is important. God was sovereignly directing these cows to head to a priestly city in Israel.

The Philistines followed the cows to the border of the Israelite land and stopped and let the cows go and they watched as the cows took the ark back to Israel.

God had sovereignly brought these Philistines to the point where they not only desired to get rid of the ark; they didn’t even dare step one foot in Israelite land. God can break the most powerful enemy and bring them to the point where they will fear Him. There is nothing too hard for God.

## **PART #2 – The reaction of the Israelites. 6:13-18**

The scene changes from the actions of the Philistines to the reaction of the Israelites.

**Verse 13** says that the people in Israel were reaping their wheat harvest in the valley. It had been seven months since Israel had been defeated by the Philistines. It had been seven months since Israel had lost 34,000 men. The funerals were long over and seven months later life goes on. The people are working because they still need to make a living and they still need food.

So they were out harvesting the crop. This event probably occurred in late May or early June, because that is when the harvest typically took place.

As they were working in the fields, they probably saw and heard something very odd. The cows were probably walking along lowing and the Israelites looked up and saw two cows pulling a cart with no human. They spotted the ark on the cart. **Verse 13** says they were “glad” to see that.

That word “glad” means they were joyful and cheering with their voices “leaping for joy” (William Gesenius, *Hebrew Lexicon*, p. 791). These people were elated. No longer was Israel “Ichabod” with the glory of God gone, but now the glory of God was back.

This is a tremendous display of God’s sovereignty. These people are not seeking after God and they are not seeking after the ark, which contains the word of God. God is sovereignly bringing it to them. God is sovereignly blessing His people and they are looking for it and they don’t deserve it.

This is exactly what God did when He saved us. We were involved in living life and God in His sovereignty intervened and we looked up and saw our need for Jesus Christ and we believed on Him and were saved. These Jews were not looking for God's word to come to them, any more than we were. God sovereignly brought His blessings into our lives and we sure didn't deserve it.

According to **verse 14**, the cows brought the cart to the field of Joshua, a Levitical priest, who lived in this community and they stopped and stood by a large stone. We don't know a thing about this Joshua other than he was a man from Beth-shemesh.

It cannot be just a coincidence that God walked these cows to a man named Joshua. Obviously, he had been named after the Joshua who had originally brought Israel and the ark into the land. Now that the ark was back in the land, it went first to a man named Joshua.

Now there was a large stone near Joshua. So the people took the wood of the cart and split it and they offered the cows as a burnt offering to the LORD. You cannot help but feel bad for the cows, who had to leave their calves and be led of God to slaughter.

But think about Jesus Christ in this. He had to leave His family in heaven to come to this sinful world to be led by God to slaughter so He could save us. We should all feel the hurt and the pain of that.

By the way, God did not tell them to do this, they just did it. Obviously before they chopped up the cart, they took off the ark of the LORD. They decided to chop up the cart, build a fire and sacrifice the cows.

We don't know their motives for chopping up the cart and offering the cows. We must assume that by doing this, it is some admission that they were guilty or some attempt to appease God or thank God via some burnt offering.

It is specifically stated that the Levites took down the ark. It is certainly possible that they ran the wood shafts through the ark box to bring it down. The text does not say. According to **verse 15**, the Levites took it down and also they took the box that contained the Philistine articles of gold and they offered more burnt offerings and sacrifices to the Lord.

This all looks so impressive and so reverent and so right, but Israel still had a problem reverencing God and His sacred word. All of this stuff does not impress God.

The people of God were all happy and all emotional but they had lost their reverence for God and His word. They forgot just how sacred God's word was. They may have forgotten, but God did not.

According to **verse 16**, the five leaders of the Philistines stood at a distance watching this take place in the valley, and when they saw this they went back to Ekron. I am certain that the Israelites saw the five Philistine leaders turn away and go back home. This was a great moment.

According to **verses 17-18**, the Israelites had the golden tumors, one for each of the five Philistine key cities and they had all of the golden mice which represented one for all of the cities in the Philistine territory. We don't even know how many golden mice there were, but there were many because this included the fortified cities and the smaller villages.

When I Samuel was written, that large stone on which they sat the ark was still standing in the field of Joshua. The writer is basically saying you can go today and actually see the rock where this took place.

Now to this point everything appears to be wonderful for Israel. Life seems good. You are harvesting a crop and the ark shows up and you have your religious services. However, the word of God has not been obeyed and there is a lack of respect and reverence for God and there does not even appear to be a desire to do what is right.

The Levites do not appear to be studying the word or consulting with God-appointed leadership. They are just doing their own religious activity and they are about to pay dearly.

Just because people go to church and appear to worship God does not mean that it is acceptable in the sight of God. There are many who say they worship God and they have no reverence for the word of God.

### **PART #3 – The judgment of God against the Israelites. 6:19-21**

The same cows that brought the ark on the cart to Beth-shemesh could have just as easily been led by God to bring the ark to Shiloh, where it belonged. But God stopped it at Beth-shemesh and the priests decided they would handle things their way.

To this point, these religious leaders are not consulting God nor are they consulting Samuel, who is the prophet of God. They are still operating on the basis of their own religious whims. We may remember that they decided to take the ark to the battlefield and that cost them.

Now they decide to let people file by and look into the ark box. According to **verse 19**, God struck down 50,070 people. God literally caused this tragedy to His own people and His people lost their lives.

The number 50,070 has been questioned by some saying it is a mistake and should be 70. Josephus thinks it was 70 as does the Septuagint. But we think the number 50,070 is accurate. First of all, the number has unanimous support from the Masoretic Hebrew manuscripts and secondly, **verse 19** ends with the words "great slaughter." The words "great slaughter" were used in I Samuel 4:10 and there it referred to a loss of 30,000 soldiers.

Now the Philistines had loaded the ark on the cart and walked away. They just wanted to get rid of it and God was working to bring His word back to His people.

God did not let His people get away with thinking lightly of His word. God's word is to be treated reverently and respectfully by His own people. Israel should have known better. God's people should have known that God is a Holy God and you do not tamper with His word.

According to **verse 20**, the men were finally beginning to figure out that God is a Holy God and you do not just come up with your own rules for worship. They were finally thinking, maybe we should fear this God for He is holy.

According to **verse 21**, the people began to realize we need leadership to help figure this out. So they sent messengers about 15 miles north-east to Kiriath-jearim to come get the ark.

Isn't this interesting? The Philistines did not want the ark in their cities and neither do these Israelites of Beth-shemesh. Instead of these people saying we need to get right with God, they basically say someone come and get this ark and take it away.

You cannot worship God in an acceptable way and not reverence Him and His word.

**Verse 20** is the key question of life. Who is able to stand before this holy God? Frankly, no one. God is holy and we are sinful. So no one is able to stand before God, in and of himself. It is estimated that billions of people have lived on this earth since the days of Adam. Not one of them is able to stand on his own before a Holy God.

Some want to question the number 50,070 in judgment; there will probably be 50 billion people who will end up in hell thinking they can stand before a holy God. There is only one way to stand in His presence and that is to be robed with the righteousness of Jesus Christ that comes by faith alone in Him.