

1 Samuel 6-8 Chapter Study

INTRODUCTION

1 Samuel tells the story of 3 men; Samuel, the last Judge of Israel; Saul, the first king, & David, the second & greatest king of Israel.

I. Samuel Chs. 1-8

A. His Birth Ch. 1-2:11

B. Eli's Household 2:12-36

C. Samuel the Prophet 3-4:1

D. The Ark of the Covenant Among the Philistines
4:1-6:12

1. The ark is captured 4:1-11

2. Eli dies 4:12-22

3. The Philistines troubles with the ark Ch. 5

4. The Philistine solution 6:1-12

¹Now the ark of the LORD was in the country of the Philistines seven months.

It had been in 3 of their 5 major centers – Ashdod, Gath, Ekron, where it had wreaked havoc.

A devastating plague broke out among the Philistines where they took the ark.

The plague was associated with mice, painful tumors, & wide-spread death.

So many commentators assume this was an outbreak of the bubonic plague which has decimated entire regions of the planet at different times throughout history.

What's amazing is that it took 7 months before they were willing to admit that they were in error regarding their response to the ark of God.

They'd originally taken it as a trophy of their victory over Israel.

And even though God had immediately shown His superiority to Dagon, their chief idol, by knocking him down & lopping off his head & hands, they still refused to render Him the honor He deserved.

When plague came, instead of turning in repentance & faith to worship Him, they sent Him away from Ashdod to Gath.

When the plague broke out in Gath, they sent the ark to Ekron.

When the plague came there, it removed any doubt about what was happening – the God of Israel was punishing them.

Now, the rational course of action at this point ought to have been this:

- 1) The God of Israel is real & powerful; more powerful than the gods the Philistines have been serving.
- 2) Therefore, Believe in & serve Him.

So this is where we see the conversion of the entire Philistines nation.

Not quite . . .

²And the Philistines called for the priests and the diviners, saying, “What shall we do with the ark of the LORD? Tell us how we should send it to its place.”

Wrong question. It should be, “What shall we do,” not “with the ark of Yahweh,” but “with Yahweh of the ark?”

Instead of putting their faith in God, they only think about how to get rid of Him.

The Philistines are an extinct race, but their mindset is alive & well in millions of people today.

They know God is real, they can’t escape the evidences of His presence & power, but they do whatever they can to avoid dealing with Him.

³So they said, “If you send away the ark of the God of

Israel, do not send it empty; but by all means return *it* to Him *with* a trespass offering. Then you will be healed, and it will be known to you why His hand is not removed from you.” ⁴Then they said, “What *is* the trespass offering which we shall return to Him?” They answered, “Five golden tumors and five golden rats, *according to* the number of the lords of the Philistines. For the same plague was on all of you and on your lords. ⁵Therefore you shall make images of your tumors and images of your rats that ravage the land, and you shall give glory to the God of Israel; perhaps He will lighten His hand from you, from your gods, and from your land.

The Philistine priests tell them to prepare a *trespass* offering.

This was an *admission of guilt*; that they’d mistreated God & wanted to make amends.

The offering was to take the form of golden tumors & rats; these had been part of the plague that had ravaged the land.

They believed that when these images left their territory, the affliction would go with them.

In v. 4, it says they were to make **5 images** of the tumors & rats.

But ch. 5 only tells us of 3 of the cities the ark went to.

It was there for 7 months, so it’s possible that after Ekron it went to the other 2 cities of Ashkelon & Gaza.

Or it may be that the plague just spread out from Ashdod, Gath & Ekron to cover all of their territory.

⁶Why then do you harden your hearts as the Egyptians and Pharaoh hardened their hearts? When He did mighty things among them, did they not let the people go, that they might depart?

The priests warn the people against making the same mistake as the Egyptians who witnessed, not 1 but 10 plagues, each

one worse than the one before.

Note that the Philistines had heard about the Exodus & God's judgment of Egypt.

This is nearly 500 years later! But the story Of God's power and care for His people is well known by Israel's enemies!

This is *one more reason* why the Philistines ought to have put their faith IN God, instead of trying to send Him away.

⁷Now therefore, make a new cart, take two milk cows which have never been yoked, and hitch the cows to the cart; and take their calves home, away from them. ⁸Then take the ark of the LORD and set it on the cart; and put the articles of gold which you are returning to Him as a trespass offering in a chest by its side. Then send it away, and let it go. ⁹And watch: if it goes up the road to its own territory, to Beth Shemesh, *then* He has done us this great evil. But if not, then we shall know that *it is not His hand that struck us—it happened to us by chance.*"

This shows both the brilliance of man & how spiritually blind he can be AT THE SAME TIME!

The plan is inspired – it totally stacks the deck against God.

They're going to put the ark on a cart, then attach 2 cows to it.

But these are *milk* cows – not oxen, not *work* cattle.

They've never worn a yoke, never pulled a wagon or plow.

And while it's tough to train a single cow to wear a yoke and pull in the right direction, yoking 2 new cows together is a recipe for disaster!

When training a new animal to wear a yoke, it's always paired with a stronger one that's worn the yoke for a long time.

You *never* put 2 new cows in the same yoke; that cart

is going no where!

What adds to the impossibility here is that these are 2 cows that've recently calved; & their calves are going to be locked up, out of sight.

The maternal instinct would mean that cart is going home to where those calves are, not to Israel.

So the odds of the ark returning to Beth Shemesh are nil.

This is a brilliant plan because IF the cart does head up the road to Beth Shemesh, it can mean only one thing – God is real & the plague is His judgment!

But notice the conclusion they draw if the cart doesn't go – all that's happened for the last 7 months was “by chance.”

Yeah, Dagon just fell over in front of the ark, not once, but twice, by chance.

It's just a freak accident that the second time his head and hands were neatly severed from his torso and left sitting neatly in the doorway of his temple.

It's just a coincidence that where ever the ark goes, an infestation of rats & mice breaks out, people get massive painful swellings under their arms and in their groins, and then they start dropping like flies.

It's chance! Chance is the culprit.

It's fascinating to me the way people who deny the existence of God want to attribute limitless power to “Chance.”

God didn't create the universe – it happened by chance.

Chance isn't a *thing* – it's a word we use to describe mathematical probabilities.

It describes the likelihood of a consequence based on certain factors.

But there's no power in chance – chance ***DOES nothing!***

The Philistines already had all the evidence they needed to come to faith in God.

The testimony of Egypt & Exodus. Their own experience

with the ark.

What they're about to see ought to have put them over the edge & brought them to a place of conversion.

¹⁰Then the men did so; they took two milk cows and hitched them to the cart, and shut up their calves at home. ¹¹And they set the ark of the LORD on the cart, and the chest with the gold rats and the images of their tumors. ¹²Then the cows headed straight for the road to Beth Shemesh, and went along the highway, lowing as they went, and did not turn aside to the right hand or the left. And the lords of the Philistines went after them to the border of Beth Shemesh.

This is just amazing! Those cows took to the yoke as though they'd been born to it.

Their path never faltered—it went straight up the road up to Beth Shemesh.

And though they went so unerringly, they made clear their discomfort.

It says they “lowed.”

This isn't a moo. It's the mournful cry of a cow in pain. I like what David Guzik said a year ago when he was here & taught on this passage.

We might expect that God would cause these cows to head up the road to Israel all happy; singing a praise song & skipping along with joy, like those cows on the CA cheese commercials.

But they go straight on their path, groaning the whole way. Why?

As those Philistines followed behind, every time one of those cows moaned, it reminded them that what they were doing in hauling that cart up to Beth Shemesh was against their nature.

Every moan, every groan was a bold statement – Chance

has **NOTHING** to do with this. God is real. What are you going to do about it?

Every star in the night sky is a clear declaration to man –
Chance had nothing to do with this.

Every leaf on every tree on every mountain says – God is real.

The Spirit asks – What are you going to do about it?

Simple reason ought to have moved the Philistines to continue their journey all the way into faith in Israel's God.

They turned around & went home, not because of a lack of *evidence* for God's power, but because they didn't want to make the changes faith in Him would require.

They chose instead to serve Dagon, a defeated, powerless idol who would let them do what they want.

E. The Ark Returns to Israel 6:13-7:2

1. At Beth Shemesh 6:13-20

¹³Now *the people of Beth Shemesh* were reaping their wheat harvest in the valley [June]; and they lifted their eyes and saw the ark, and rejoiced to see *it*.

¹⁴Then the cart came into the field of Joshua of Beth Shemesh, and stood there; a large stone was there. So they split the wood of the cart and offered the cows as a burnt offering to the LORD. ¹⁵The Levites took down the ark of the LORD and the chest that *was* with it, in which *were* the articles of gold, and put *them* on the large stone. Then the men of Beth Shemesh offered burnt offerings and made sacrifices the same day to the LORD.

As soon as the cart pulled into one of the fields belonging to the people of Beth Shemesh, it stopped.

There was a large flat rock nearby where the Levites carried the ark and set it down.

Then the people broke up the cart for firewood & offered up

the 2 cows that had drawn it as a sacrifice.

¹⁶So when the five lords of the Philistines had seen *it*, they returned to Ekron the same day. ¹⁷These *are* the golden tumors which the Philistines returned as a trespass offering to the LORD: one for Ashdod, one for Gaza, one for Ashkelon, one for Gath, one for Ekron; ¹⁸and the golden rats, *according to* the number of all the cities of the Philistines *belonging* to the five lords, *both* fortified cities and country villages, even as far as the large *stone of Abel* on which they set the ark of the LORD, *which stone remains to this day* in the field of Joshua of Beth Shemesh.

Gaza, Ashkelon, & Ashdod were right on the coast.

Gath & Ekron were inland, near the border with Israel.

Throughout the period of the Judges, the Philistines had been growing in numbers, wealth, & military might.

They began pushing the western border of the tribes of Judah, Dan, & Ephraim backward, capturing many of the cities & towns that lay in this area – including Beth Shemesh.

At this time, the city was back in Israelite control, but it changed hands several times.

¹⁹Then He struck the men of Beth Shemesh, because they had looked into the ark of the LORD. He struck fifty thousand and seventy men of the people, and the people lamented because the LORD had struck the people with a great slaughter.

The ark was a fabled piece of their history they had a lot of stories for.

Curiosity got the best of them & they decided to take a peek inside.

The fact that they'd only had Levites remove it from the cart when it came back proves they knew how the ark *ought*

to have been handled.

But they violated its sanctity & opened it.

God brought immediate judgment by executing them.

Now – there’s a lot of debate over how to interpret the number given here.

50,070 seems like too great a number.

Beth Shemesh was a good sized city, but 50,000 would have included all the smaller villages surrounding the city too.

As early as the first Century, the Jewish historian Josephus commented on this story & said it was 70 men.

The Hebrew scholars Keil & Delitzsch say that it ought to be understood that of the 50,000 people living in the area, 70 men were struck down.

What made the “slaughter great” as v. 19 says, was that when these men opened the ark, they immediately dropped dead.

²⁰And the men of Beth Shemesh said, “Who is able to stand before this holy LORD God? And to whom shall it go up from us?”

If 50,070 men had died, who’d be left to say this?

These guys realize the ark has been mistreated while among them.

But instead of repenting of their foolishness in opening it, they deal with it a the Philistines had – get rid of it.

Notice their question: “Who is able to stand before this holy LORD God?”

They recognize God is holy. But instead of honoring that holiness, they try to *distance* themselves from it.

How very different is the heart of David, who some 70 years later will do all he can to bring the ark to himself.

He has it brought to Jerusalem & puts it into a tent near his house.

Then he writes – One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after. That I may dwell in the house of the Lord, all the days of my life.

Better is one day in your courts, than a thousand elsewhere.

2. At Kirjath Jearim 6:21-7:2

²¹So they sent messengers to the inhabitants of Kirjath Jearim, saying, “The Philistines have brought back the ark of the LORD; come down *and* take it up with you.”

Why they picked Kirjath Jearim is unknown.

It may be that this city was known for its devotion to God.

¹Then the men of Kirjath Jearim came and took the ark of the LORD, and brought it into the house of Abinadab on the hill, and consecrated Eleazar his son to keep the ark of the LORD. ²So it was that the ark remained in Kirjath Jearim a long time; it was there twenty years. And all the house of Israel lamented after the LORD.

The people of Kirjath showed the proper reverence worthy of the ark.

The reason it wasn't returned to the tabernacle was because the tabernacle & Shiloh, the city where the tabernacle had stood had been destroyed by the Philistines.

The priests had saved the *furnishings* but the walls & basic structure of the tabernacle had been destroyed.

So the ark was left at the home of a priest in Kirjath.

His son was assigned the full-time task of safeguarding it.

20 years pass. 20 years of Philistine domination.

And finally, after 2 decades of oppression, the people of Israel awaken from their spiritual slumber & apathy and realize their plight is the result of their own rebellion against God.

In yet another of the many cycles of blessing & judgment

they've known for the last several hundred years, they're reaping the fruit of their own foolishness in turning from God.

So they begin to cry out in repentance, lamenting their failure to abide in the covenant they've been called into by the Lord.

F. Samuel the Judge 7:3-17

³Then Samuel spoke to all the house of Israel, saying, "If you return to the LORD with all your hearts, *then* put away the foreign gods and the Ashtoreths from among you, and prepare your hearts for the LORD, and serve Him only; and He will deliver you from the hand of the Philistines."

Since we covered this passage a couple Sundays ago, we'll be brief with it tonight.

Samuel puts a test to the genuineness of their repentance.

If they really want to return to the Lord, then they have to put away their idols.

God is jealous & will tolerate no competitors to the love of His people.

His jealousy is not for *Himself*, but for the *sake* of His people.

He knows that what is best for man is to love God with all we've got.

SO Sam tells the people true repentance will take action to rid one's life of all that stands in the way of devotion to God.

If they will do that – then God will deliver them from oppression.

⁴So the children of Israel put away the Baals and the Ashtoreths, and served the LORD only.

They followed through on the call to practical repentance.

They got rid of *everything* that marked devotion to *anything* but God.

Then they *renewed* their devotion to God.

⁵And Samuel said, “Gather all Israel to Mizpah, and I will pray to the LORD for you.”

Mizpah was at the focal point of tension with the Philistines.

It was near where *all* the tribes were struggling with the Philistines & made for a good place to launch a campaign against them.

⁶So they gathered together at Mizpah, drew water, and poured *it* out before the LORD. And they fasted that day, and said there, “We have sinned against the LORD.” And Samuel judged the children of Israel at Mizpah.

For an agricultural people, water was life.

Pouring water was a symbol of *deep repentance* – a picture of pouring out their hearts to God in sincere sorrow for having gone astray.

Psalms 22:15 & Lam 2:19 speak of “pouring out the heart like water” before God.

Here they actually poured out water as a symbolic act, representing their desire to express to God the depths of their remorse.

It’s a good thing to give expression to our worship through specific acts as our hearts are moved toward God.

They fasted & prayed for forgiveness.

Samuel then began to apply God’s Word to them in setting things right that had long been wrong.

⁷Now when the Philistines heard that the children of Israel had gathered together at Mizpah, the lords of the Philistines went up against Israel. And when the children of Israel heard *of it*, they were afraid of the Philistines.

Word reached the Philistine kings that a huge gathering of Israel was under way at Mizpah on their eastern frontier.

They concluded this must be a mobilization for invasion &

responded by marching out to meet them.
When the people saw the Philistine army marching toward them, they panicked.

⁸So the children of Israel said to Samuel, “Do not cease to cry out to the LORD our God for us, that He may save us from the hand of the Philistines.”

This time they responded to the challenge the right way.

They asked Samuel to intercede with God on their behalf.

They knew there was no hope for them without God’s intervention.

⁹And Samuel took a suckling lamb and offered it as a whole burnt offering to the LORD. Then Samuel cried out to the LORD for Israel, and the LORD answered him.

When someone offered an offering as a whole burnt sacrifice, it was meant to represent the one who brought it who was offering himself up wholly to God.

Samuel took a *young lamb* because it best represented Israel at this point.

Their repentance had birthed a *new beginning*.

As Samuel offered up the sacrifice, he prayed, and God heard.

¹⁰Now as Samuel was offering up the burnt offering, the Philistines drew near to battle against Israel. But the LORD thundered with a loud thunder upon the Philistines that day, and so confused them that they were overcome before Israel.

The ancients considered thunder the voice of God.

Baal, the god of storm & war, was one of their main deities.

So when the thunder & lightening cracked close over their own heads, they were terrified.

Remember, they’d just recently known the God of Israel’s judgment when they had the ark.

Now their *own* gods seemed to be on Israel’s side.

This created confusion in the normally well-ordered ranks

of the Philistine army.

¹¹And the men of Israel went out of Mizpah and pursued the Philistines, and drove them back as far as below Beth Car. ¹²Then Samuel took a stone and set *it* up between Mizpah and Shen, and called its name Ebenezer [Eben-ha-ezer, stone of help], saying, “Thus far the LORD has helped us.” ¹³So the Philistines were subdued, and they did not come anymore into the territory of Israel. And the hand of the LORD was against the Philistines all the days of Samuel. ¹⁴Then the cities which the Philistines had taken from Israel were restored to Israel, from Ekron to Gath; and Israel recovered its territory from the hands of the Philistines. Also there was peace between Israel and the Amorites.

When the men of Israel saw the Philistine army fall apart, they attacked and pushed them well back into their own territory. All the land they’d taken between Ekron & Gath was restored.

While the Philistines continued to hold Jewish territory in various places, and presented them with some future challenges, this battle marked the beginning of the end of Philistine dominance of Israel.

Saul would further the campaign & David would effectively finish it.

The last of the Canaanite tribes to remain in Israel, the Amorites who lived just north of the Philistines on the coast also made peace with Israel at this time when they saw the Philistines weakening.

As a monument to this victory, Samuel set up a stone & named it Eben-ha-ezer.

While we don’t know exactly where this stone is today, there are many dozens of these stone monuments all over the Middle East.

They're called *massebah*; from the Hebrew 'to set up.'

Jacob set up for stone memorials.

Moses had the people erect 12 of them around the foot of Mt. Sinai.

Joshua made a pile of them as a memorial to crossing the Jordan river.

He set up another as a memorial to the renewal of the covenant at the end of his life.

Samuel wanted future generations to remember the great victory God had given them that day.

Such memorials to God's faithfulness are a great idea for the people of God.

¹⁵And Samuel judged Israel all the days of his life.

¹⁶He went from year to year on a circuit to Bethel, Gilgal, and Mizpah, and judged Israel in all those places. ¹⁷But he always returned to Ramah, for his home was there. There he judged Israel, and there he built an altar to the LORD.

The circuit described by these 4 cities lies in the center of the nation but covers quite a bit of distance from east to west.

By frequenting these 4 places, he covered most of the main roads leading north & south, making it easy for people who needed justice to have their case heard.

G. Israel Demands a King Ch. 8

¹Now it came to pass when Samuel was old that he made his sons judges over Israel. ²The name of his firstborn was Joel, and the name of his second, Abijah; they were judges in Beersheba.

Since being a judge was a divine call, it was presumptuous of Samuel to appoint his sons to that position.

It seems like a basic principle of leadership that one ought to appoint someone to take over when you're gone.

But man does not pick who leads in the work of God.

Out of concern for the future of the nation, Sam probably thought the responsible thing to do would be to appoint his sons to carry on after he was gone.

But here's a good example when common sense isn't the same as good sense or thinking through the ways of God.

Of course it's up to **God** to call & appoint those **He chooses** to lead His people.

Beersheba was the southernmost city in Israel.

Besides the city itself, there wasn't much population that far south.

It's mostly desert outside the oasis of the city.

So it's a bit curious why Joel & Abijah made Beersheba their home.

This was well south of where Samuel made his rounds, so maybe that's what they were doing – trying to get away from Pops.

The reason why is clear in the next verse.

³But his sons did not walk in his ways; they turned aside after dishonest gain, took bribes, and perverted justice.

Joel & Abijah may not have been as immoral & debauched in their sin as the sons of Eli, but they were bad guys.

They were greedy & sold their judicial decisions to the highest bidder.

Samuel, like Eli before him, failed to discipline his errant sons.

⁴Then all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah, ⁵and said to him, "Look, you are old, and your sons do not walk in your ways. Now make us a king to judge us like all the nations."

Since we covered this passage Sunday, we'll skim it tonight.

The elders of the tribes saw Samuel was aging and would soon pass from the scene.

As leaders, they were concerned with preparing for the

future.

They knew Samuel's sons weren't cut out for taking their Dad's place.

So they gathered and came up with the pragmatic solution of asking for a king.

They didn't pray & seek God. They just looked around to see what other nations were doing & took their cue from them.

6But the thing displeased Samuel when they said, "Give us a king to judge us." So Samuel prayed to the LORD.

What the elders had failed to do when faced with a challenge, Samuel was quick to do – pray.

He was bummed at their request because he knew it revealed their hearts.

Though he'd spent his life reminding them they were in covenant with God & He was their source & supply, they say they want to be like everyone else.

7And the LORD said to Samuel, "Heed the voice of the people in all that they say to you; for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them. 8According to all the works which they have done since the day that I brought them up out of Egypt, even to this day—with which they have forsaken Me and served other gods—so they are doing to you also. 9Now therefore, heed their voice. However, you shall solemnly forewarn them, and show them the behavior of the king who will reign over them."

God told Sam to give the people what they wanted.

They were determined to have a king and if Samuel didn't pick him, they'd pick one for themselves.

Because they're not thinking clearly, their choice would be disastrous.

At least with Samuel doing the selection they have a chance

to get someone decent.

Now – Samuel’s first choice, Saul, will be a perfect case study in what power does to people, even good people!

Saul will be a great & enduring lesson to the people of God of what happens when you use mere human wisdom instead of looking to the Lord when making your decisions.

Sam’s second selection, David, will then be a great lesson in why listening to the Lord is foremost.

There’s an important lesson here for leaders.

God says to Samuel, “You’re sad & disappointed with their request for a human king because it reveals their hearts are beginning to stray once more. Sam, I’ve known that sadness since Day 1 – 500 years ago when I first delivered them out of Egypt.”

While the *joys* of serving God as a leader are fantastic, on the reverse side, the *sorrows* can be equally *difficult*.

You teach & come alongside someone for personal counsel. You take calls for help in the middle of the night; go over to their house, the hospital, or jail.

You pour your heart out in love & care – urging them to follow the Lord.

Then one day, you stand at the head of their coffin, giving the final prayer before it’s lowered into the earth.

Their pre-mature death the result of their foolish choices; decisions they made that were 180 degrees away from the counsel you urged so passionately for so long.

Samuel learned that the heart that loves with the love of God, will know the pain of God when that love is abused & refused.

God told Samuel to grant their request for a king, but to first warn them of the can of royal worms they were opening . . .

¹⁰So Samuel told all the words of the LORD to the

people who asked him for a king. ¹¹And he said, “This will be the behavior of the king who will reign over you: He will take your sons and appoint *them* for his own chariots and *to be* his horsemen, and *some* will run before his chariots. ¹²He will appoint captains over his thousands and captains over his fifties, *will set some* to plow his ground and reap his harvest, and *some* to make his weapons of war and equipment for his chariots. ¹³He will take your daughters *to be* perfumers, cooks, and bakers. ¹⁴And he will take the best of your fields, your vineyards, and your olive groves, and give *them* to his servants. ¹⁵He will take a tenth of your grain and your vintage, and give it to his officers and servants. ¹⁶And he will take your male servants, your female servants, your finest young men, and your donkeys, and put *them* to his work. ¹⁷He will take a tenth of your sheep. And you will be his servants. ¹⁸And you will cry out in that day because of your king whom you have chosen for yourselves, and the LORD will not hear you in that day.”

The day would come when the king they wanted so badly now would become a burden too great to bear.

Then they would cry out for the good ole’ days when it was just God they looked to.

But by then it would be too late. Some things can’t be undone.

This is human nature. If we aren’t satisfied with God, we won’t be satisfied with anything else.

¹⁹Nevertheless the people refused to obey the voice of Samuel; and they said, “No, but we will have a king over us, ²⁰that we also may be like all the nations, and that our king may judge us and go out before us and fight our battles.”

This reveals the unrealistic expectations they have for a king.

They actually think being judged by him according to the whole new set of laws he'll pass will be good!

And did they really think he would fight their battles himself?

How foolish it is when people think they know better than God what they need.

²¹And Samuel heard all the words of the people, and he repeated them in the hearing of the LORD. ²²So the LORD said to Samuel, "Heed their voice, and make them a king." And Samuel said to the men of Israel, "Every man go to his city."

So he sent the elders back to their homes to await his summons to present to them their new king.