

**CALVARY PANDAN BIBLE-
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

[Adapted from Bethel Bible-Presbyterian
Church, 10 Downing St. Oakleigh, Vic.,
3166]

DHW BIBLE CLASS

LESSON 4C

FIRST SAMUEL

CHAPTER 6

INTRODUCTION

God is no respecter of persons. Ignorance is no excuse when it comes to obeying God's Word. We have been given the Word of God and if we choose not to read it, we will still be held accountable to God. This is like the law of the land. It is an unwritten rule that every citizen is expected to know the law of the land. If they break the law of the land, they cannot plead ignorance. They will be punished.

The Bethshemites were smitten by the LORD for their disobedience to the scriptures. God delivered the judgment as promised in the scriptures. God's holiness is an attribute which many people do not seem to appreciate. God cannot be taken for granted. The disobedience resulted in the deaths of 50,070 men.

These are precious lessons for all believers who care about spiritual growth.

COMMENTARY

**How The Ark of God should go
Home—vv. 1-9**

The ark of God had been in the possession of the Philistines for seven months before they consulted their "theologians" (the priests and diviners) on the manner of sending it back. The "theologians" decided on a plan of action that would, at the same time, determine whether the plagues and destruction were indeed inflicted by the God of Israel. The similarities of the afflictions upon the five Philistine cities were too obvious for these heathens to doubt that the affliction was due to their possession of the ark of God. Although it took them seven months to figure it out, at least they finally did. It was a case of better late than never!

According to the plan, they would not send the ark of God back empty handed. They would make a trespass offering to appease the God of Israel so that they would be healed – in so doing, they would know whether it was the God of Israel that had passed judgment on them for taking the ark. Basically, what these "theologians" proposed was to put God to the test. It was stated that the trespass offering would be: "five golden emerods and five golden mice". The number five was chosen because of the five Philistine lords and the five cities. These offerings were crafted according to the shape of the plagues that had afflicted the

Philistines. The trespass offering was their idea of a “guilt” offering. It is interesting to note that the word for “trespass offering” is the same as that used by God in Leviticus such as Leviticus 5:6, “*And he shall bring his **trespass offering** unto the LORD for his sin which he hath sinned, a female from the flock, a lamb or a kid of the goats, for a sin offering; and the priest shall make an atonement for him concerning his sin*” (emphasis added). These heathen have sinned and therefore they must give a trespass offering.

They were warned by these “theologians” not to harden their hearts like the Egyptians. These events took place more than 350 years ago and they still remembered the power of the LORD over Pharaoh and the Egyptians! Their warning from 1 Samuel 6:6 is instructive. It says, “*Wherefore then do ye harden your hearts, as the Egyptians and Pharaoh hardened their hearts? when he had wrought wonderfully among them, did they not let the people go, and they departed?*” They acknowledged that the God of Israel was a “HE”. They linked the hardening of their hearts with the stubbornness of the Egyptians. (Remember it took the Philistines seven months to finally admit their sin and submit to the God of Israel.) The final victory belonged to the God of Israel. No matter how much sinful men may wish to resist,

they will lose in the end. God will ultimately prevail, no matter what.

The Philistines Returned the Ark— vv. 10-12, 16-18

The offerings of the golden emerods and mice followed the ancient belief that “like cures like”. The emerods stood for the diseases suffered by the Philistines while the mice stood for the rats that spread the plague and destroyed the crops. The Philistines were reminded not to harden their hearts like the Pharaoh of Egypt. They believed that they needed to appease whoever had afflicted them. Since “He” had afflicted us with these emerods on our bodies and destroyed our crops using the mice, then let us make images of these “afflictions”. Perhaps “He” would remove these afflictions once His anger was appeased. The fact that they were prepared to make the offerings meant that they had acknowledged that the God of Israel was more powerful than their Philistine gods. Also it was not the strength and power of their gods that gave them the victory over the people of Israel.

The suggestion of these ignorant “theologians” was that the ark of God had to be transported by a new cart drawn by two “milch” cows—cows which were still nursing their calves and which had never been yoked. The calves of the two cows were to be kept in a pen while the two “milch” cows were sent to

take the ark of God back into Israeli territory. Why use “milch” cows? Under normal circumstances, the cows would rebel against being yoked. Even if they were yoked, they would seek to return to their calves. They would not move in the direction where they ought to go without someone driving and directing them. If the cows go by themselves eastward to Bethshemesh, it would mean that it was the God of Israel who had done the evil to the Philistines. If not, then their sufferings would be just an accidental occurrence. In other words, this was a real test of whether it was “chance” or “God” that had afflicted them.

This put God to the test and it gave God an opportunity to show His sovereignty and power over the Philistines. That the God of Israel is the God of the whole world is a forgotten doctrine. The people believed in localised gods. The gods of the Philistines were only the gods of the Philistines and no one else. In short, man can will god into existence just as he can will them into ignominy. But this cannot be true of the one living and true God. He is and will always be who He is regardless of whether man responds to Him or not. Even if man chooses to ignore Him, He will remain the same yesterday, today and forever. He will still judge man. He is the God of the universe and therefore He has

sovereign control over the enemies of Christians.

Having prepared everything according to plan, they sent the two cows on their way -- tied to a new cart on which stood the ark of God and all the golden emerods and mice. The Philistines did not place the emerods and golden mice INSIDE the ark of God but by the side of it. 1 Samuel 6:8, “And take the ark of the LORD, and lay it upon the cart; and put the jewels of gold, which ye return him for a trespass offering, **in a coffer (box) by the side thereof**; and send it away, that it may go.” (Emphasis added)

The milch cows went straight towards Bethshemesh, lowing as they went. They kept on a straight course without turning right or left. Following behind were the lords of the Philistines. They followed the cows to the edge of the border with Bethshemesh. After the Philistines saw that the Bethshemites accepted the two milch cows and took back the ark of God, they returned to their own cities.

The LORD vindicated Himself before the Philistines. The Philistines realized that it was no accident that they were afflicted for the past seven months with painful emerods and destruction of crops by the mice. They learned a very precious lesson. What do you think was the lesson?

**The Folly of the Bethshemites—
vv. 13-15, 19-21**

Bethshemesh was a Levitical city.¹ The Levites were instructors of God's Holy Word. They were supposed to know the Law of God inside out. Their main pre-occupation was to study and teach the Word of God. That was the reason God spread the tribe of Levites throughout the Land of Promise in 48 Levitical cities. No Israelite city was not within reach of these Levitical cities, which were chosen by God Himself. Some of the inhabitants of Bethshemesh were reaping their wheat harvest in the valley when they looked up and saw the ark of God coming to them on a cart. The cart came to a halt in the field of Joshua where there was a great stone. The Levites were called to take down the ark of God. They chopped the wooden cart and made a fire out of it. Then they killed the cows and offered them as a burnt offering unto the LORD. What the Levites did here may have contravened two of God's laws. The first was that no female cow is allowed for a burnt offering, which was what they did here. Leviticus 1:3, "*If his offering be a burnt sacrifice of the herd, **let him offer a male without blemish: he shall offer it of his own voluntary will at the door of the tabernacle of the***

congregation before the LORD" (Emphasis added). Just because they were enthused to see the ark of God returned to them, their ignorance cannot be used as an excuse for them to offer an unacceptable burnt offering. They should know better. Their ignorance will later result in the deaths of 50,070 men of Bethshemesh.

The second was that no Israelite was allowed to build an altar anywhere they like to make an offering. The place for an altar must be sanctioned by God. Deuteronomy 12:5-6, "*But unto the place which the LORD your God shall choose out of all your tribes to put his name there, even unto his habitation shall ye seek, and thither thou shalt come: And thither ye shall bring your burnt offerings, and your sacrifices, and your tithes, and heave offerings of your hand, and your vows, and your freewill offerings, and the firstlings of your herds and of your flocks.*" If this was allowed, then the people of Israel will not have to go to The Tabernacle located in Shiloh for their sacrifices. They can simply, out of expediency and convenience, build altars all over Israel and start doing their own offerings! If this was allowed, it would soon lead to the death of the spiritual life of Israel. The doctrine of one place and one place only for worship and for all the people in Israel would become a farce.

¹ Joshua 21:16 And Ain with her suburbs, and Juttah with her suburbs, and Bethshemesh with her suburbs; nine cities out of those two tribes.

Something terrible happened to the Bethshemites. The LORD smote 50,070 men because they looked into the ark. No one was allowed to see the inside of the ark and live.² The ark of God was a sacred object. It must be properly handled and not meddled with by anyone who was not consecrated by God. Again God's sovereignty and holiness were emphatically stressed. God's people must follow what was revealed in the Scriptures or be severely dealt with. God is no respecter of persons.

There was a great lamentation because the LORD had smitten a large number of people. The people in Bethshemesh were terrified and bewildered. But they quickly learned that the LORD God is holy! No one can stand before Him. They had to send the ark of God to another place. They realized that no one from amongst them could accompany the ark of God. Accordingly, they invited the people of Kirjath-jearim to come to Bethshemesh to fetch the ark of God. The men of Kirjath-jearim did as requested.

PRACTICAL VALUE

The Philistines learned and recognized the power and glory of the LORD God of Israel. It took seven months, many deaths and the destruction of their crops for them to learn their lesson. It was a painful lesson for the Philistines.

The Philistines' understanding of the necessity to offer sacrifices to the LORD in order to appease His wrath was correct although their method was wrong but they did not have God's commandments to guide them. They tested God and God established His power and glory.

It is very sad that the Israelites, who were the chosen people of God and who were given the oracles of God and who had witnessed so many stupendous works, failed to understand God's Word. The people of Bethshemesh, a Levitical city, were severely punished for not following God's orders in the scriptures. Ignorance is no excuse. God, who is holy, will judge all who sinned against Him. AMEN.

² Numbers 4:20 But they shall not go in to see when the holy things are covered, lest they die.

DAILY READINGS & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Daily Readings

Monday: 1 Samuel 6:1-9.

Tuesday: 1 Samuel 6:1-12.

Wednesday: 1 Samuel 6:1-15.

Thursday: 1 Samuel 6:1-18.

Friday: 1 Samuel 16:1-21.

3. Would God have accepted the trespass offerings of the Philistines?

Discussion Questions

1. Do heathens generally know that when they sin, they have to give a kind of trespass offering? What is the significance on the preaching of the gospel?

4. Are there offerings today that Christians make to God that God would not accept? The assumption is that they offer them with a clean heart, that is, their motives are right.

2. What lesson about the God of Israel did the Philistines learn when the two milch cows went quietly toward Bethshemesh?

5. Was the punishment of God upon the Bethshemites too severe?
