



First Baptist Church  
Gaines  
Gather, Grow, Go.


**'HONING IN ON THE  
HEART!'**



A KINGDOM.



YOUR HEART.



A KING.

**A VERSE-BY-VERSE SERIES ON THE BOOK OF  
1ST SAMUEL  
DURING WEDNESDAY NIGHT SERVICES IN 2024**

*'Honing in on the Heart!' Sermon Series*

**Sermon #11:**

*'The Ark Comes Home!'*

Wednesday, April 17th, 2024

*Last week in 'Honing in on the Heart':*

- Last week in our study of 1st Samuel, we looked at 1 Samuel 5:1-12. I preached a sermon entitled *'The Mistake of Messing with God!'*
  - I asked the question: *How can we see that when the Philistines steal the ark of God and put it with their other gods that they are making a big mistake of messing with God?*
    - Point 1: *False gods Fall. (V. 1-5)*
    - Point 2: *Fear goes Far. (V. 6-12)*
  - *Based on last week's sermon, I hope and pray we've all been able to see the tragedy that becomes of our lives when we choose to mess with the Lord by disobeying Him.*

*'The Ark Comes Home!'*

1st Samuel 6-7:2

**Sermon in a Sentence:**

*In this scripture text we see that the Ark of the Covenant will come home to Israel, for now. This is significant because we see an Experiment that was Planned, an Exciting Path, but it ends in Excruciating Pain for Israel.*

**Intro:**

- Due to the fact of how much the Ark of the Covenant moves around in the books of 1-2 Samuel, we may be tempted to deem tonight's text as **insignificant.**
  - *In fact, I know some Preachers who have preached through 1st Samuel, that have skipped over chapter 6 due to the fact that it may 'bore' their hearers.*
    - *May we not forget that it is God who put His Word together through His Spirit.*
      - Everything, (both NT and OT), has a purpose and a reason for being included.
- **For the nation of Israel at this time, the Ark of the Covenant had been gone for 7 months.**
  - Meaning, they had been absent of the presence of God.
  - *This is significant because the Ark was a representation of God's Covenant with the people.*

- *This was an arrangement that God was to be Israel's God and Israel was to be His people.*
  - *This is also significant because this was the first time that Israel had lost the Ark!*
    - Here's what John Woodhouse said  
*'Never before had Israel lost possession of the ark. They had suffered setbacks from enemies, but no enemy had ever taken the ark of the covenant of Yahweh.'*
  - Much of this stems from their own disobedience to God, as well as the ramifications from the Elide Priestly line that we saw earlier in 1st Samuel.
    - *But even as we will see tonight, once the Israelites have the ark back again, they still do not obey the Lord fully and violate the rules of the Ark, to where even more Israelite people will die.*
  - There's a lot we can grow from and glean from in God's Word tonight.  
*\*Read 1st Samuel 6-7:2\**

**Question to Ask:**

*What is the significance of the Ark returning home to Israel that we find in this text?*

**Point 1: *An Experiment Planned. (V. 1-9)***

- The Philistines had realized that they had a really big problem.
  - *The majority of people in their country had been touched in some form or fashion by this plague.*
    - And as we saw in chapter 5 of 1st Samuel last night, they finally were able to put two and two together that it was the possession of the ark that was causing this.
  - *They tried moving it about their own nation, but this ended up causing even more problems for the Philistines.*
    - *The reason that they were not more open to the idea of returning it back to Israel early on, is the fact that this wasn't usually done.*
  - It would be a slap in the face to their own government and nation if they were to return their beloved trophy from war.
    - *But when physical pain becomes so severe, you just want it to be over with with any means necessary.*
  - So, the Philistines have an experiment planned on how to figure out whether or not this plague came from the God of Israel due to their possession of the ark, or not.
    - I believe there are **4** things that we can see in these verses that demonstrate the

Experiment that the Philistines had planned.

- **Time Period. (V. 1)**

- ‘The ark of the LORD was in the country of the Philistines seven months.’
- For 7 entire months, the Philistines let their pride get to them and the pain spread.

- ***I believe ‘7 months’ is to be interpreted symbolically as well as literally.***

- ***Think about how many Philistine lives were lost simply because their government didn’t want to swallow their pride, do the right thing, and return the ark to Israel.***

- For 7 Months, this went on.

- **True Perplexity. (V. 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 we shall send it to its place.”
- I’m sure at this point, that the leaders of this nation were working under severe peer pressure.

- ***The phrase ‘the philistines’ in verse 2 is plural, and conveys a general sense.***

- ***The leaders needed to do something because people were dying.***

- ***In chapter 6, they consulted and pleaded with the ‘lords’, the government officials.***

- But now, they want the priests and the diviners to do something. But just who

are these priests and diviners in the context of Philistia?

- ***Both of these religious positions were a part of their religious functionalities.***

- ***Priests: the priests were in charge of the worship of the multitude of philistine gods.***
- ***Diviners: The diviners were those that would obtain information about the future by interpreting different signs and omens.***
  - What you and I would refer to today as future telling of sorts.
- ***Isaiah briefly mentions them and their reputation in Isaiah 2:6***
  - ***‘For you have rejected your people, the house of Jacob, because they are full of things from the east and of fortune-tellers like the Philistines, and they strike hands with the children of foreigners.’***
- ***In Deuteronomy 18:10-14, these activities are not allowed in Israel. Deuteronomy 18:10-14 also gives a small glimpse into what the culture of ancient civilizations was like.***
  - ‘There shall not be found among you anyone who burns his son or his daughter as an offering,[a] anyone who practices divination or tells fortunes or interprets omens, or a sorcerer 11 or a

charmer or a medium or a necromancer or one who inquires of the dead, **12** for whoever does these things is an abomination to the LORD. And because of these abominations the LORD your God is driving them out before you. **13** You shall be blameless before the LORD your God, **14** for these nations, which you are about to dispossess, listen to fortune-tellers and to diviners. But as for you, the LORD your God has not allowed you to do this.’ Deuteronomy 18:10-14

- *So, the Philistines go to these religious leaders with their main question, “What shall we do with the ark of the LORD? Tell us with what we shall send it to its place.”*
  - *They are tired of the pain and what is going on, and they believe that getting rid of the ark will go a long way in helping them improve.*
- *The Plan. (V. 3-6)*
  - ‘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.” **4** 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. **5** 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. **6** 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?’

- *So the religious leaders come up with what they think the nation of the Philistines needs to do.*
- *Ronald Youngblood, a Hebrew Scholar and Professor, said this ‘Ancient religious protocol prohibited the worshiper from approaching his gods empty-handed’*
  - While this is odd and very foreign to us, this was regular in the ancient world.
  - In fact, our God even told the Israelites that they should not come to Him empty handed in the following scripture verses:
- *Exodus 23:15:*
  - ‘You shall keep the Feast of Unleavened Bread. As I commanded you, you shall eat unleavened bread for seven days at the appointed time in the month of Abib,

for in it you came out of Egypt. None shall appear before me empty-handed.’

- **Deuteronomy 16:16**
  - “Three times a year all your males shall appear before the LORD your God at the place that he will choose: at the Feast of Unleavened Bread, at the Feast of Weeks, and at the Feast of Booths. They shall not appear before the LORD empty-handed.’
- *The philistines religious leaders believed that if the Lord were to accept this offering, that they would be healed and that they would know that it was the God of Israel who was responsible for this plague.*
  - I also think that verse 4 gives strong evidence for the possibility that this was the bubonic plague that the Lord put on the philistines. Due to the linking of the tremors, rats, and the plague.
- **But this plan is significant because according to scholar Robert D. Bergen, this section is the longest recorded speech ever given by Philistines in the OT.**
  - In this section there are 120 Hebrew words that were spoken by the Philistines. This is also the longest stretch of dialogue between the Philistines, four consecutive statements.

- **The amount of detail given here into the Philistine dialogue, may be there to demonstrate an important theological truth. Even to us today.**
  - *We’ve already read tonight scriptures from elsewhere in the OT where diviners were wrong and God’s people were not to use them.*
- The Philistines did, and perhaps this is part of the root of their problem all along.
  - **I believe this dialogue with the Philistines gives great evidence that Christians today should not ever go to fortune tellers.**
    - Or people that supposedly talk to the dead, witches, or anything of that nature.
- Verses 4 & 5 show us that the Philistines thought they should make images of the plague that had hit them so hard.
  - *(I wonder if they had someone with tumors pose for the sculpture making?)*
- *Interestingly, the Philistines use some verbiage that would resemble the Torah, but they also went against what God had told His people concerning these things.*
  - In making these ‘offerings’ the Philistines would be in direct violation of the prohibition given in OT scripture.

- **Exodus 20:4**
  - “You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth.’
- Robert D. Bergen said *‘This advice apparently represents a syncretistic blend of pagan imitative magic and perverted Torah Ritual.’*
  - *Which shows that you can have the ‘right’ motives when doing something for God and still completely miss actually glorifying God.*
- Verse 6 reveals that the Philistines religious professionals knew about what had happened in the Exodus. They had heard about the Hebrew God.
- **Tricky Process. (V. 7-9)**
  - ‘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. **8** 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 **9** 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.”

- ***In addition to the golden figures that they were going to send with the ark, they came up with a tricky process in order to determine whether or not these trials/tumors really did come from the Lord.***
  - After all that they had been through, they were still not 100% that this had come from the God of Israel.
- ***So, the Philistines come up with a plan to transport the ark to on a cart.***
  - ***Transporting the ark on a ‘cart’ was also not allowed according to the Torah in Numbers 7:7-9 and 2nd Samuel 6:3-13.***
- ***The philistines had 2 distinct reasons for going about this tricky process with the Cart, the Cows, and the Ark.***
  - #1: Remove the Deadly Object from their nation.
  - #2: Figure out what the true origin of their tumors and disease was.
- ***They want to figure out whether or not this has come from God, based on where the cows will go.***
  - It was known at that time as it is known in our day, that two untrained milk cows could not pull a cart together very well.

- *And if they were to pull it anywhere, it would be home to their calves.*

○ *But, if the calves pulled it towards Israel, they knew that this would be a work of God and that it was the God of Israel who was responsible for this.*

- *A mother would never leave her baby, unless it was a work of God upon her. And in this case, we will see that it was.*
- This situation reminds me greatly of where Gideon put out the fleece to see whether or not it was God in Judges 6.
  - So, we have seen that there is an experiment planned by looking at the Time Period, True Perplexity, The Plan, and a Tricky Process.

**Point 2: *An Exciting Path. (V. 10-18)***

● *For us today, it was an exciting path that the cows and carts followed, straight to Israel, simply because we know that this was God's hand and power at work.*

- As it was exciting to the Israelites at first, they would eventually die due to looking straight at it as our scripture indicates.
  - In verses 10-18, I believe there are **3** things that we can see about this exciting path that the cows took.

● *Convincing Fashion. (V. 10-12)*

○ ‘The men did so, and took two milk cows and yoked them to the cart and shut up their calves at home. **11** And they put the ark of the LORD on the cart and the box with the golden mice and the images of their tumors. **12** And the cows went straight in the direction of Beth-shemesh along one highway, lowing as they went. 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.’

○ *Verse 10 shows us that the Philistine men obeyed the counsel that they received from the religious leaders, and went about this tricky process to see who afflicted them with these tumors.*

○ *What occurs in verse 12, is in convincing fashion indeed.*

■ Verse 12 tells us that they went in the ‘Straight’ direction.

■ *\*Word Study\**

- The word ‘straight’ comes from the Hebrew word **‘Yasar’** יָשָׁר *which literally means straight and not crooked or twisted.’*

■ *This straight route is emphasized in the Hebrew to show that this was God in action!*



- *The phrase ‘Loving as they went’ in the Hebrew texts suggests that they were going against their natural instincts and inclinations, by a power other than themselves.*
  - *It was creator God, who was causing them to do this. He (God) is over all creation.*
- Indeed, this was a convincing fashion.
- **Citizens Flabbergasted. (V. 13-16)**
  - ‘Now the people of Beth-shemesh were reaping their wheat harvest in the valley. And when they lifted up their eyes and saw the ark, they rejoiced to see it. **14** 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. **15** 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. **16** And when the five lords of the Philistines saw it, they returned that day to Ekron.’
  - *Verse 13 shows us that the citizens of Beth-shemesh were reaping their wheat harvest, which means that it was probably spring time (May-June).*
- *The destination of the cows and the cart is also very important to consider.*
- *Beth-Shemesh was a Levitical city that was set aside for the clan of Kohath, which was the Levitical family that was in charge of taking care of the Ark.*
  - According to Numbers 4:4 and Numbers 4:15.
- *Beth-Shemesh was also the homeplace for the descendants of Aaron, according to Joshua 21:13-16.*
  - *I believe this important detail shows us that they should have known how to handle and treat the Ark of the Covenant. Which is why God strikes them down dead when they do it incorrectly.*
- *Verse 14 shows us that the cart came into the field and was stopped there.*
  - They probably placed the ark on the stone, and used the wood from the cart to produce a burnt offering.
- *This is where the citizens of Beth-Shemesh make their first mistake.*
  - *According to Leviticus 1:3, only males were to be used for burnt offerings. Not female cows, heifers.*
    - “If his offering is a burnt offering from the herd, he shall offer a



male without blemish. He shall bring it to the entrance of the tent of meeting, that he may be accepted before the LORD.’  
Leviticus 1:3

- **Scholar Stephen J. Andrews said ‘This reckless act in not precisely following the sacrificial regulations of God ‘serves as an early indication of impending divine judgment’ against the people of Beth-Shemesh’**
- In verse 15, we see that the Levitical priests were called to come and take care of the Ark.
  - While they did make an attempt, they did not cover the ark but left it exposed on the stone.
    - **Numbers 4:5 reveals that the ark was supposed to be covered.**
      - ‘When the camp is to set out, Aaron and his sons shall go in and take down the veil of the screen and cover the ark of the testimony with it.’
- **While it is a great and noble thing to give an offering to God after the Ark returns home, they didn’t follow God’s rules and regulations in doing so.**

■ **Yet again, it’s great to do great things for the Lord, but we must do them under His parameters.**

- **Custom Formality. (V. 17-18)**
  - ‘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, one for Ekron, 18 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 beside which they set down the ark of the LORD is a witness to this day in the field of Joshua of Beth-shemesh.’
  - **Verses 17-18 is a formal list with a heading.**
    - Details from this event and a summary are given.
  - **You may find this odd that the narrator puts a summary of the statue offerings that the Philistines made and gave, but in reality this is part of the narrator showing the validity of these events.**
    - **There have been those that have come along and stated that the cows couldn’t have done that, they could not have gone opposite of their babies and towards Israel.**

- **The narrator mentions this custom formality to show that God really did do this.**
- **Scholar John Woodhouse says 'It sounds as though these golden objects were still around as the narrator wrote this account. His readers knew of them. The known golden articles testify that the Philistines followed the advice of the priests and diviners with regard to the golden tumors.'**
  - It was still known to that day, which is why the narrator mentioned this custom formality.
- Tonight in looking at how the Ark Returned home, we saw the Experiment that was planned, the Exciting Path, now, we need to look at the Excruciating pain that the Israelite people experienced because of their disobedience.

**Point 3: An Excruciating Pain. (V. 19-7:2)**

- **These verses that we find here are perhaps some of the most confusing and perplexing in the OT.**
  - God was mocked and belittled while the ark was in a pagan land.
  - **But just because the ark had returned to Israel, did not mean that God was any less powerful or terrifying than He had ever been before.**
    - I believe there are 2 ways that we see Israel endured an Excruciating Pain.
- **A Deadly Consequence. (V. 19)**

- 'And he struck some of the men of Beth-shemesh, because they looked upon the ark of the LORD. He struck seventy men of them,<sup>[a]</sup> and the people mourned because the LORD had struck the people with a great blow.'
- **70 Isralite men died that day, but why?**
  - **\*Word Study\***
    - The english words 'looked upon' come from the Hebrew word **'Ra'ah'** רָאָה **which means to see.**
    - **In the Hebrew text it is used with a preposition 'in' or 'on', and so this phrasal verb indicates more than just looking at something.**
    - **The Hebrew seems to suggest that this would be an irreverent staring.**
- **Everyone in Beth-Shemesh saw the ark, but here they gazed.**
  - Other than that, we have no more of a description to know how they got themselves killed.
  - Whatever they did was obviously disrespectful towards God and we know that God does not tolerate that.
- **70 men were dead and the problem that Israel had just 7 months ago had not yet been solved.**

- ***The Hebrew phrase that is translated to 'great blow' in verse 19 is the same phrase that was used as a great slaughter in 1st Samuel 4:10.***
  - These were certainly deadly consequences.
- ***A Desperate Call. (V. 20-7:2)***
  - ‘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?” 21 So they sent messengers to the inhabitants of Kiriath-jearim, saying, “The Philistines have returned the ark of the LORD. Come down and take it up to you.” And the men of Kiriath-jearim 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. 2 From the day that the ark was lodged at Kiriath-jearim, a long time passed, some twenty years, and all the house of Israel lamented after the LORD.’
  - ***At the start of chapter 6, the Philistines were the ones who asked the perplexing question. Now, it’s God’s own people.***
    - ***They make a desperate call for those in Kiriath Jearim to come and take the ark which was 10 miles from Beth-Shemesh and 1,400 feet higher in elevation.***

- ***The people of Kiriath-Jearim respond in a good way by having Eleazar (a common name for priest), come and take care of their Ark.***
  - ***The ark will remain here until David takes it to his capital in 2nd Samuel 6:2-4.***

**Conclusion:**

- ***Tonight when you heard the sermon title ‘The Ark comes home!’ you may have thought that tonight’s message would have a happy ending.***
  - As we have seen in our scripture text tonight, that was not just the case.
- ***The israelites had been punished by God by not having His own presence in their possession through the ark of the Covenant.***
  - ***Yet even through this, they never truly learned their lesson.***
    - As sad as this ending is, may we not find ourselves in the same boat.
  - May we be sure today that our hearts are right and pure before almighty God. He already knows, and one day, He will expose.
- Tonight we have seen:
  - ***Point 1: An Experiment Planned. (V. 1-9)***
  - ***Point 2: An Exciting Path. (V. 10-18)***
  - ***Point 3: An Excruciating Pain. (V. 19-7:2)***