

I Samuel 5-7 • God Reveals Himself to the Philistines'

Teacher: Pastor Paul LeBoutillier
Life Bible Ministry

In the last couple of chapters, we dealt with a war between Israel and the Philistines. The Philistines won, to the tune of many, many Israelites who lost their lives. Not only that, but in some cases, some people would say, to make matters worse, the ark of God was stolen by the Philistines, and if you will, taken captive. That symbol of the presence of God, where God said, I will meet with my people.

I want to be careful how I say this. But have you ever heard somebody say? I have a hard time reading through the Old Testament because there's just so much judgment. It's like God is angry all the time. I like to hang out in the New Testament where there's a lot of love and grace and forgiveness. There's stories like Jesus, forgiving this woman caught in the act of adultery.

But when you go through the Old Testament, all you have is the ground opening up and swallowing people, and fire coming out, and burning them to a crisp. And that just seems like the general sort of rule as it relates to the difference between the Old and the New Testaments, and the way God responds to people in that situation. And I can understand that from a cursory reading.

But I want you to note tonight, and not just tonight, but I want you to note that as you're reading through and studying through the Scriptures, there are many references in the Bible. References, that's probably not the right word. Many instances, stories, examples, in the Bible of the, in the Old Testament of God's grace and mercy, which we don't even notice.

We're so accustomed sometimes to the New Testament where we see Jesus doing things in such blatant fashion. Like the story I related where the woman's caught in the act of adultery. Everybody's picking up stones, have their arms cocked back, ready to let them fly. And they say to Jesus, in the Law of Moses, it says we should stone this woman, and what do you say?

And you guys know the story. He bends down, writes in the dust. And so! They're asking Him. So what should we do? He says, great, fine, stone her. Let him who is among you cast the first stone. And it says, they began to drop their

stones and go away, beginning with the oldest to the youngest. And then Jesus has the conversation with the woman. Where are your accusers, ma'am? And she says, I don't see them, they're not here. And He says, neither do I condemn you? Go and sin no more. (John 8:4-11)

Oh, we love that story. It's a great story just because, it's just it just warms the cockles of our heart, and we just walk away with the warm fuzzies of God's mercy and forgiveness.

You are going to see tonight in this first chapter that we're going to be looking at, unprecedented mercy, unprecedented mercy. And we're going to highlight it tonight so that you can see it. And so that you can, if somebody ever says to you, oh, I don't like to read the Old Testament because it's so full of judgment and anger. Or if you've even considered that yourself in the past, you can see that, in fact, nothing is further from the truth.

Chapter 5, beginning at verse 1. *“When the Philistines captured the ark of God, they brought it from Ebenezer to Ashdod. ² Then the Philistines took the ark of God and brought it into the house of Dagon and set it up beside Dagon.” (ESV)*

Stop there for just a moment. Dagon was just one of the Philistines primary gods. They were pagans. And the very definition of a pagan, as I've said many times before, is that they believed in a multiplicity of gods. But Dagon was a chief deity in the nation of the Philistines.

And pagans who believed in a multiplicity of gods, believed that when you went to war against your enemy, and you either lost that battle or you won that battle. It wasn't just you winning the battle, and your enemy losing, or your enemy winning, and you losing. It was your gods who were in battle. Okay. They attributed everything to their gods and they had a god for everything.

And so when they won in victory over the Israelites here, they attributed the victory to Dagon. And they're basically saying Dagon beat YAHWEH. Okay? That's how their thinking goes.

And so we read here in the first 2 verses that they captured the ark of the covenant, which essentially was that symbol of God's presence among His people. And they brought it in and set it in front of this statue of Dagon so as a trophy of victory. Here's this trophy, and we're going to set it here in front of Dagon in a sense to say, Dagon won. Dagon is the strong guy on the block, and he beat YAHWEH, who is the weak guy on the block, at least in this instance.

Now God is going to show them, in no uncertain terms, that even though His people may be defeated because of disobedience, you have not defeated their God. Because their God happens to be the all-powerful, eternal, living God, who created the heavens and the earth, and there is no God other than Him. And that's the point that God is going to make.

But I want you to take note of something, people. I want you to take note of who God is making this point to that we're going to read about in this chapter. It's to the Philistines. Okay? The Philistines, pagans. God is going to make a point. I am God and there is none beside Me.

Let's keep reading. Verse 3, *“And when the people of Ashdod rose early the next day, (this is actually funny) behold, Dagon had fallen face downward on the ground before the ark of the LORD. So they took Dagon and put him back in his place.”* So they took Dagon and put him back in his place.

You got to imagine what it was like for the priests, these Philistine priests, to come in the morning, and they're all perky, because we just won a big battle, and we've got the ark of the covenant, we got a trophy. And we brought it in, and we set it in front of Dagon, and we turned out the lights, and we went to bed thinking, we're just all that and more. Right?

And they get up in the morning, and they come into the thing, and they're probably whistling a little tune to Dagon, and there they find him, on his face, before the altar, or before the ark, rather, of the Living God. On his face. Almost as if he is in a posture of worship. Because, as many people in the Middle East still do, they did then, you worship by prostrating yourself before the Lord. You, face down to the ground. On your knees and face down. Dagon is just, boom, down on the ground, and so forth. In kneeling, if you will, or down in submission and reverence.

Notice what they did here. They took Dagon and put him back in his place. What a bummer when you got to put your god back on his pedestal. I mean, I've always thought to myself, I never want to worship a god that I got to pick up.

I always want to worship a God who picks me up because I fall down a lot. I don't expect Him to do any falling down. I want Him to, if you got to pick your god up and dust him off, I think it's time to get a new god. I mean, just saying.

And people, your god can be all kinds of different things. And in the case of the Philistines, it was Dagon. And then again, he was one of many. But people can have gods, things that we worship, things that we turn to when life gets hard.

And if you've got to pick up your god, and dust him off, and put him back on his pedestal, then I think you've got a problem with your god.

Verse 4. *“But when they rose early on the next morning, behold, Dagon had fallen face downward on the ground before the ark of the LORD, (but this time it was worse) and the head of Dagon and both his hands were lying cut off on the threshold. Only the trunk of Dagon was left to him.”* Now this is starting to get embarrassing. And it goes on to tell us that *“⁵ This is why the priests of Dagon and all who enter the house of Dagon do not tread on the threshold of Dagon in Ashdod to this day.”*

People, remember I said how God is a God of mercy and I'm going to show you here in this chapter that God is a God of mercy. First of all God is revealing Himself. He's revealing Himself in a way that these pagans will understand.

Now they're not getting it and they should have responded after they saw their Dagon statue on its face before God the first time. Then they come in the second day and his head and hands are busted off. They should have responded. They should have stopped and thought, now, hold on here a minute. Let's think this thing through, but rather they respond with just more superstition. And by the way, people, superstition has pagan roots, okay? When you say pagan and you say superstition, you're essentially saying the same thing.

And Christians, we need to be very careful about superstitious beliefs, because they should have no place in the economy of our thinking. We just really shouldn't have room for them. And that's everything from your lucky underwear, to be making sure that you don't cross the path of a black cat, or walk under a ladder or, heaven forbid, break a mirror.

But you know what? We've all been through that stuff and we've all heard those things and there's something deep inside of us that wonders, and shudders without even thinking about it when something like that happens. But superstition has its roots in paganism. Okay.

And so that is why they now, whenever they walked into the temple of Dagon there in Ashdod, they gingerly stepped over the threshold because it was on that threshold Dagon lost his head. They figured if Dagon lost his head over that threshold, there must be something to that threshold. Never stopped to think maybe it was the God of the Jews that had something to do with it. No, they thought it was the threshold. That's a dangerous threshold. Yeah. Anyway.

It says in verse 6 that, *The hand of the LORD was heavy against the people of Ashdod, and he terrified* (your Bible may say, *he confused them* which I think is part of that whole terror issue. But it says He also) *...afflicted them with tumors, ...*” That's what the ESV says. Your Bible may have a different word this year's there.

We're not exactly sure. All we know that it was something painful and people were dying. In fact, tumors was, if you got a tumor, you were on the more positive side of things. Because there were, as we're going to read here, a lot of people were just flat out just dropping dead. And it happened *“both Ashdod and its territory.”* And Ashdod was one of the major cities of the Philistine territory.

We see here that Dagon isn't the only one who's been afflicted by the presence of YAHWEH in their land. Now the people are being severely affected. Verse 7 says, *“And when the men of Ashdod saw how things were, they said, “The ark of the God of Israel must not remain with us, for his hand is hard against us and against Dagon our god.””*

Now, you and I, not being pagans, read this sentence and it sounds ridiculous. For us to say, your god just beat up my god, so maybe we need to get rid of your god. But you see, a pagan doesn't think that way. And what they go on to say defines how pagans do think.

Look what it goes on to say. It says, *“⁸ So they sent and gathered together all the lords of the Philistines and said, “What shall we do with the ark of the God of Israel?” They answered, “Let the ark of the God of Israel be brought around to Gath.” So they brought the ark of the God of Israel there.”*

To you and I, a non-pagan, this sounds like they're just saying, well, let them deal with it. But see, pagans don't think that way. They're very territorial. They believed that a different venue could create a whole different outcome between warring gods or that sort of thing.

Do you remember when Israel was coming through to the promised land and they were passing through the land of Moab and the king of Moab, do you remember, hired Balaam to curse all of Israel? And Balaam was pretty much going to go for it. Even though he told the king of Moab that I can only say what God gives me to say, but he says, that's okay.

He gets him up on a mountain and they could see the whole nation of Israel and camped down in the valley. And so the king of Moab, who was Balak said to

Balaam, all right, there they are. You can see them now, curse them. And so Balaam opens up his mouth and you remember what comes out? Blessing. He blesses them. Oh, and some of the most beautiful things you'll ever read in the Scripture about Israel. I mean, it's absolutely beautiful.

You remember what Balak does? He's like, arrggghhh. I told you to curse my enemies. Well, let's take you to another hill. That's the way pagans think. He's thinking, okay, the God of Israel obviously is too strong right here in this locale so let's go over to another hill and you can curse them from there where I don't think YAHWEH is too strong over there. These other gods, I think, are stronger in that vicinity, so let's take you over to...

You and I read that and we go, what does it matter what hill He's on? we're just we're just so used to thinking that our God is the God of heaven and earth. And where can you go to get away from our God, right? Isn't that what David says? Do you understand that when David wrote that: God, where can I go to get away from You or to be removed from Your Spirit? (Psalm 139:7) He's countering paganism. Because paganism says, go over there. Your god isn't at all strong over there. That's where you can actually escape him.

Do you understand when Jonah ran from God, he was thinking more like a pagan than he was a believer because he tried to run from God. I'm going to go away where God can't find me. That's pagan thinking, you see.

And that's why the leaders of Ashdod are saying, well, let's send this thing to Gath, maybe Dagon is stronger in Gath and YAHWEH is weaker in Gath. Hey, it's worth a shot. Yeah, they're just spitting in the dark, but they're going to give it a try here. All right.

“⁹ But after they had brought it around, the hand of the LORD was against the city, causing a very great panic, and he afflicted the men of the city, both young and old, so that tumors broke out on them.” Not good.

“¹⁰ So they sent the ark of God to Ekron.” You can about imagine by now how this thing is going to go because the devastation of what has happened in the first two cities has now preceded the ark.

And it tells us that, *“But as soon as the ark of God came to Ekron, the people of Ekron cried out, ‘They have brought around to us the ark of the God of Israel to kill us and our people.’”* ¹¹ *They sent therefore and gathered together all the lords of the Philistines and said, ‘Send away the ark of the God of Israel, and let it return to its own place, that it may not kill us and our people.’ For there*

was a deathly panic throughout the whole city. The hand of God was very heavy there.¹² The men who did not die were struck with tumors, and the cry of the city went up to heaven.

The ark of the LORD was in the country of the Philistines (we're told here in chapter 6) seven months.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."³ 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."'" Okay, stop there.

They're guessing a little bit. But there's one thing the Philistines know by this time and that is, they've gotten into trouble because they stole the ark of the God of Israel. They know that for absolute sure.

Now they've decided, the only way to stop these plagues upon their people, and we haven't even heard about the mice and rats and all that stuff yet. But the only way to get rid of this is to return this thing. And so they come to their priests and they say, so how should we go about doing this?

And the priest just, of course they're religionists and religionists are great at guessing about things. And so they, here's what you need to do. You've already offended this God, so you got to make sure when you send this thing back so you don't offend Him further because you don't want it to go any worse for you.

Here's what they're going to do. *"And they said, (verse 4, they asked these guys, they said) "What is the guilt offering that we shall return to him?" (and) They answered, (all right, here we go) "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..."* This is about the dumbest thing I've ever heard of.

I mean, I understand the concept of what they're trying to do. They're trying to, pacify the God of Israel, and they're trying to express in some way that they recognize, He is behind this thing. And they're trying to say in a sense, I'm sorry. You do what you can. They're spit balling here.

"So ...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 (look at this) 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?"

Isn't this interesting? Do you guys understand this happened hundreds of years earlier? And they still remembered and recounted what God had done to deliver His people from bondage in Egypt all those many years ago. That's pretty amazing, isn't it? I mean, that just became part of just everybody's remembrance of history in the land.

They're going to give some further instructions here. *“⁷ Now then, take and prepare a new cart and two milk cows on which there has never come a yoke, (so they’ve never pulled a yoke before) 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.”* Stop there for a moment.

This last idea of theirs involving the cart and the cows and stuff like that is really quite brilliant. Because they knew what they were doing was they were making it almost impossible for this cart to get back home naturally. In order for the cart containing the ark of God to get back to Israel, it would have to get there supernaturally.

Because here's what they knew. You take two milk cows who have just calved, right, and you separate them from their calves. And you, don't even think about hooking them to a cart yet, just separate them from their calves. You know what they're going to do? They're going to go find their calves. They're going to walk toward their calves. It's natural. It's nature. Okay. That's the first thing they're doing.

Second thing is they're yoking two cows that have never ever pulled anything before. Now animals don't by nature pull in tandem correctly unless you train them to do so. There's a training process when you've got two animals, they've got to learn to pull together. If they don't pull together, the cart doesn't go anywhere.

You've got this situation where they've put together circumstances, as I said, that are almost impossible. You'd look at that and you'd go, that cow is never going to Israel. I mean, there's just no way.

First of all, those cows are going to fight against each other, and they're going to fight to get loose from their yoke, and get back to their calves, and that's where

they're going to go. That's by nature. That's by nature. I like this. I do. I kind of like this. I think this is kind of a cool test that they're doing here.

And it says in verse 10, *“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, (and we’re told that they were) lowing as they went.”*

They were just doing the thing, moo, all the way up the road. You like my cow thing? I learned to do that doing stories to my children when they were little. And the cow says.

But anyway, you almost get the impression that there's an angel who grabbed onto that yoke and is just pulling them along and that they're going against their will, because they're crying out, like you would expect a cow to do who's been separated from her calf, right?

It says here, we're in the middle of verse 12 that *“They turned (and this is amazing, 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. ¹³ 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.”* Guys, you with me? It came into Israelite territory and stopped. Just, I'm home! Hi honey! Sort of a thing.

And it says that, *“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 (presumably representing the five cities) saw it, they returned that day to Ekron.”*

What do you suppose those guys said when they went back to the rest of the people? Yep, it was their God because we created a situation that was impossible. Naturally speaking, for this thing to make its way back to the country and it went back. Not only did it go back, they got, it got right to the border and it stopped.

Now, you remember I said at the very beginning, that this chapter is full of God's mercy. Here's what I meant. Who is God revealing Himself to here too? The Philistines. He is a God of mercy.

Here's the here's the issue, here's the problem I suppose. Don't go looking for any Philistines today. You won't find any. They're gone. There's no such thing as a Philistine. They died out. Completely gone. They didn't have to be.

Did God take pains to reveal Himself to those people? Are you kidding? Has God ever done anything like that for you? I mean, think about this. God bent over backwards to reveal Himself to the Philistines.

Their response to this whole thing should have been the God of Israel is God. And they should have gotten rid of all of their idols, and they should have kicked to the curb all of their gods and said, there is one God who created heaven and earth and He is YAHWEH and we will worship Him. But they didn't.

And again, people are always saying, oh, the Old Testament, just full of all this stuff, judgment and stuff. Here's a whole chapter that's full of nothing but God's mercy. Revealing Himself to these people.

You might say, well, how was it merciful, pastor Paul, for the people to die and for them to have a plague and tumors? Well, I'll explain that in a little bit. Because we're going to see a little bit of this happening to the people of Israel as well.

Anyway, it goes on here, and it says in verse 17, *“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,”*

For those of you who are like me and very visual, let me show you a quick map of the area, so you can see where Philistine territory. And the borders of Philistine territory changed from time to time. What I did is I put a yellow box around these five major cities: Ekron, Ashdod, Ashkelon, Gaza, and you can see Gath is a little bit more inland there in that reddish area.



But, this is the area that, we still today refer to as the Gaza Strip. And so it's very much in the news quite often. And very much a problem area still for Israel. But those are where the five major cities of the Philistine Territory were located.

It goes on in verse 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 unwallled villages.”* They made an image of all of the mice, a mouse, apparently a rat, or whatever it was, for every city, and all their outlying villages, and stuff like that. They were serious about this thing. *“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.”*

And then, I want you to note this, *“¹⁹ And he struck some of the men of Beth-shemesh, because they looked upon the ark of the LORD.”* And when it says “looked upon,” the idea is more like, *“...they looked (in) ...the ark of the LORD.”* And it says here in the ESV, *“He struck seventy men of them, and the*

people mourned because the LORD had struck the people with a great blow.” Now, stop there if you would please for a moment.

For those of you that have possibly a New King James (NKJV), or a New American Standard Bible (NASB) on your lap, you're going to note a very different number, for the number of dead. In fact, it's more like 50,700. And the issue is because of the difference in some different Hebrew manuscripts.

But you know what, the point really isn't the number. The point is the response of a holy God toward anyone who would express such irreverence toward Him and His person by going up to the ark of the covenant and looking inside. And we talked about that just a minute ago. Pastor Paul, you say the Bible isn't full of death and judgment. What about all the Philistines dying? What about the people being afflicted with tumors? What about right here? What if it was 50,000? These are Israelites and they're also people who knew better.

Let me tell you a little bit about the ark of the covenant. This is very important. First of all, the ark of the covenant, as we mentioned back when they took it into war last week, I mentioned the fact that they weren't even supposed to look at it. You with me? The only person for whom it was lawful to look at the ark of the covenant was the high priest. And he had to throw a couple of smoke bombs in the room before he walked in there. It was in the form of incense, to obscure his ability to see the ark. The high priest was the only one. His sons who were priests couldn't see it. Not until they were high priests.

The Levites who carried the ark from place to place in the wilderness, they had to go in and drape something over it first and then carry it with long poles. No touchy for the ark of the covenant. They couldn't touch it. Guess what? God said, don't even touch it or you will die. Now, the Jews knew this. The Philistines didn't know, they learned the hard way that you don't act irreverently toward the Lord God of the universe.

But please understand something about... You might say, well, why is God touchy. I mean, why, you open up and I would have loved to open up and look at the ark. I mean, because do you know what you saw in there? You guys remember, don't you? The tablets were in there. The tablets were in the ark. The ones Moses came down the mountain with, right? Second pair, but still, the tablets were in there. Pretty cool thing to look at. I'd want to see that. If you got a chance to see that, wouldn't you want to look at that?

So what is it about opening the ark and seeing that killed people? Guys, don't you understand? Over the top of the ark of God was the mercy seat, and that's

where God said, I'll meet with My people. I'll meet with you over the mercy seat but there was a mercy seat over the ark because what was inside the ark killed people. And it still kills people today.

Paul says it in the New Testament, the letter of the law kills, right? (2 Corinthians 3:6) You and I cannot look into the power of the law and stay alive, because the law is perfect. The law is holy. There's nothing wrong with the law. It is the righteous standard of God's holiness. It is the standard that you and I would otherwise be required to keep, right? Although we can't, if it were not for grace and mercy.

But because of God's mercy, which is pictured on the ark by the mercy seat on the top of the ark, because there's a mercy seat. We can commune with God, but if you are insistent, like these Philistines, like these Jews, that I am going to view the law, I am going to see the perfection of the law.

And what that's like, people, it's like saying, I will not accept Jesus Christ as my Savior. That's rejecting the mercy of God. If God wants to deal with me, He's going to have to deal with me as I am. He's going to have to deal with me according to the law. Let Him judge me. When I stand before God, I'll argue my case before the Almighty, and I'll say, I've lived a good life.

And God's going to say, compared to what? Well, compared to my fellow man. That's not the standard. Would you like to see the standard? It is in, it is embodied in the law. And when you and I look into the face of the law, we look into the face of God because it is His righteous and holy standard that we can't live up to. And it kills us. It still kills people today. Boy, don't give people the law. All it does is kill them. It's Jesus who raises us back up.

What is the law meant for? The Bible says the law was put into effect to lead us to Christ. How does it do that? It shows me. I look at it and I go, I can't do that. Because what's required is perfection. I not only have to keep the law, I got to keep it perfectly. No errors. Paul says very clearly, if you've sinned in one area of the law, you've sinned against it all, right?

So we look at the law and we go, I can't do that. So what am I going to do? I cry out to God, I cry out for His mercy. And I find it in the person of Jesus Christ, who forgives my sins, and allows me to come into the very presence of God, and commune with Him. But I have to remember at what cost I can come into the presence of God and commune with Him. It took Jesus shedding His blood and shedding it upon the mercy seat of God, which is for us, that which keeps us from the law.

Do not approach God on a judicial basis. I've said this many times. And every time somebody says, well, God's just going to have to judge me for the life I've lived. They are saying, I choose the law. Well, I don't choose the law, I choose grace, I choose forgiveness, I choose mercy, right?

So why did these people die? Because they insisted on looking into the righteousness of God, and you cannot do that and live. And God was telling them that. It's another reason, it's really interesting, but you remember Moses, Moses didn't go into the promised land, you remember that? And we all know why. He did it, because he messed up. And God said, you're not going to be able to go into the land, but you know what? That's a picture too.

The promised land is a picture of our life in Christ that we live by faith, right? The righteous shall live by faith. Walking into the promised land, crossing the Jordan, coming out of the wilderness, going into the promised land, is that picture of living my life in Christ, day by day, by faith.

Do you know what? You can't do that with the law. Moses couldn't go into the promised land because he was the embodiment of the law. The law can't go into the promised land. You need Yeshua. Isn't it interesting that the man who brought them into the promised land had the same name as Jesus? The same name?

Joshua, Yeshua is just the Hebrew version of Jesus. So the man who came in and took them by faith into the land of promise is he who is named after the Savior, who would bring us into the fullness of the promises of God, not by the law, but by mercy. Such a beautiful picture. I mean, God has just, He's done all things well, has He not? And He's given us these pictures and He gave the Philistines pictures of this and they didn't respond.

Verse 20 says, *“Then the men of Beth-shemesh said, “Who is able to stand before the LORD, this holy God?” Good question! You know what the answer is? Nobody. Nobody is. You can't stand before 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 (like) twenty years, and all the house of Israel lamented after the LORD.”

By the way the ark will stay there until David brings it back. And he'll even have a problem bringing it back the first time. Do you remember? One of his men reached out just to steady it because the oxen stumbled, and he didn't want it to fall off the cart, and he reached out just to steady it, and he dropped dead.

And David ended up saying the same thing. Who can meet, who can stand before this holy God? Who can do this? Of course, David didn't take time to look into the Scriptures and find out, oh, there's a way to carry the ark. And it's right there in the Word.

Verse 3 says, *“And Samuel said to all the house of Israel, “If you are returning to the LORD with all your heart, then put away the foreign gods and the Ashtaroath from among you and direct your heart to the LORD and serve him only, and he will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines.”*⁴ *So the people of Israel put away the Baals and the Ashtaroath, and they served the LORD only.*

⁵ *Then Samuel said, “Gather all Israel at Mizpah, and I will pray to the LORD for you.”* (this is a collective national outpouring of repentance) ⁶ *So they gathered at Mizpah and drew water and poured it out before the LORD and fasted on that day and said there, “We have sinned against the LORD.” And Samuel judged the people of Israel at Mizpah.* ⁷ *Now when the Philistines heard that the people of Israel had gathered at Mizpah, the lords of the Philistines went up against Israel. And when the people of Israel heard of it, they were afraid of the Philistines.”*

Boy, isn't that, this is just so typical. When you make a determination to rededicate your heart to the Lord, just expect a big test afterwards. Just expect it. You just say, Lord, I give Myself to you wholly. I put away all the things in my heart that are standing in the way of really, truly communing with You. And I'm going to serve you with all my heart. And it's, you're like, wow, that is so great. And then the enemy hears about it.

Now in the case of Israel, the enemy was the Philistines. But you know who your enemy is. And he'll hear about it. He'll hear when you rededicate your life to the Lord. And he'll bring some sort of an attack into your life to just freak you out and get you to go, I thought better of it. But you need to do what Samuel is going to tell the people and that's to trust God. It says, but *“they were afraid of the Philistines.”*

And then, look what they do to Samuel. Verse 8, *“And the people 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.” They come to Samuel, and they go, hey, buddy, don't stop praying.

“⁹ So Samuel took a nursing lamb and offered it as a whole burnt offering to the LORD. (that's where there's nothing left after that offering is done) And Samuel cried out to the LORD for Israel, and the LORD answered him. ¹⁰ As Samuel was offering up the burnt offering, the Philistines drew near to attack Israel. (look at this) But the LORD thundered with a mighty sound that day against the Philistines and threw them into confusion, and they were defeated before Israel. ¹¹ And the men of Israel went out from Mizpah and pursued the Philistines and struck them, as far as below Beth-car.

¹² Then Samuel took a stone and set it up between Mizpah and Shen and called its name Ebenezer;” Which means, stone of help. It’s an altar. We've talked about that before, creating altars. Altars of remembrance when God is faithful in your life. “...for he said, “Till now the LORD has helped us.” ¹³ So the Philistines were subdued and did not again enter the territory of Israel. And the hand of the LORD was against the Philistines all the days of Samuel. (in fact, it goes on to say that) ¹⁴ The cities that the Philistines had taken from Israel were restored to Israel, from Ekron to Gath, and Israel delivered their territory from the hand of the Philistines. There was peace also between Israel and the Amorites.

¹⁵ Samuel judged Israel all the days of his life. ¹⁶ And he went on a circuit year by year to Bethel, Gilgal, and Mizpah.” To this day we call that an itinerant preacher, a circuit rider, after this basic passage.

“And (there) he judged Israel in all these places. ¹⁷ Then he would return to Ramah, for his home was there, and there also he judged Israel. And he built there an altar to the LORD.” And that's where we're going to stop tonight.

But before we close in prayer, I just want to remind you of what we see here. Nation of Israel sees the mercy of God by Him judging the Philistines. They weren't even aware of it until they found out. And then they begin to mourn over their, their situation, their condition.

And Samuel steps up as a true leader and says, hey, if you're returning to the Lord, then do it with all your heart. If you're really returning to the Lord, then get rid of your idols. Get rid of them and worship God and serve Him only. And the people did. They responded. They got rid of all their idols and they began to worship and serve God. And then what happens? The enemy hears of it. Oh, yeah. We got to come after them now. We're going to...So the enemy comes out and viciously and the people were afraid. Samuel says, hey, listen, worship

God. He'll give you victory over your enemies. That's His promise. God's true to His promises. And what happens? Before the battle even ensued, God created this thunderous situation that threw them into all kinds of turmoil. And the nation of Israel was able just to waltz in there and take back their land. In other words, the battle belonged to the Lord. Right?

We get all lathered up. We get all afraid. When we've made a place in our lives where we've rededicated our hearts and then the enemy attacks. But we need to come back and say, Lord, you know what? We sang it today. If God is for us, who can be against us, and what can stand against us? If God is for us, what can stand against us?

Question is, do we really believe that Or not? That's the big deal. I mean, that's the big question, isn't it? I mean, that's what it all comes down to. I do like the fact that they, they told Samuel, hey, man, don't stop praying. Don't stop praying. And that's our part. When the enemy attacks, when you got a big opposition, pray! Oh, I hate it when I hear people say, I guess all I can do is pray. All you can do is pray? All you should do is pray. As if to say that somehow prayer is like, well, everything else failed, so I guess all I can do now is pray. It's all I can do is just hunker down until this thing is over. That's what they're saying.

When's the last time you heard somebody say, I've really been under attack lately, but you know what? I get to pray. Yes! The enemy's coming at me, but you know what? I'm praying. He can't stand. He cannot stand against the prayers of the saints, so I'm praying. I'm going to trust God. He's going to take care of this thing. That's what we ought to be saying. Unfortunately, too often it's not what we say, but it's what we should be saying.

Whenever you express your problems, it should always end with, but God. And if you don't know what to say there, then just throw in, but God is able. Sure, go ahead and tell people your issues. Tell them what's going on in your life so they can pray for you too. That's great. There's nothing wrong with that. But after you tell them, hey, here's what's going on in my life, then say this, but God is able.

We need to let those words just be permanently tacked on to every negative thing that ever comes out of our mouth. I'm scared, but God is able. This is really frightening, but God is able. This hurts, but God is able. I don't know how this is going to turn out, but God is able, right? That's what we should be doing. Let's just make a determination in our hearts that's what we're going to do because God is able.