

1st Samuel Chapters 5-7 – John Karmelich

1. This lesson has to do with God's dilemma and us. I bet you didn't know God had a dilemma! ☺
 - a) Remember that God made all sorts of promises to the Nation of Israel. For example, He stated that the Land of Israel was theirs as an unconditional promise given to Abraham. (Genesis 15:7). Further, God gave all sorts of laws and requirements upon the Jewish people as a requirement for obedience. God expected the Nation of Israel to be His witnesses to the surrounding nations.
 - b) So what does God do when Israel "messes up"? Thus is the "dilemma". If God punishes them too hard (too permanently) it takes away from God's unconditional promises. It would also show the surrounding nations that this "god" isn't too powerful if it lets other nations destroy Israel or harm them too permanently.
 - c) God needs to show the surrounding nations that the "God of Israel" is the true God, no matter how bad Israel messes up. On the other hand, there must be punishment for disobedience as God holds them to a higher standard than the surrounding nations. Thus, there is a sense of accountability to God.
 - d) This 3-chapter story is that situation. It shows how God dealt with the Philistine nation and His chosen people. The Philistines were a pagan group living in Israel. God used them to judge the Israelites for disobedience. Yet God still needs to show the Philistines that the "Hebrew God" is greater than any of their gods and they "can't mess with Him".
 - e) Now the big question: What does any of this have to do with our lives today?
 - i) God has the same attitude with believing Christians that he did with the Israelites. We are to be His witnesses to the world. God holds us to a higher standard than He does nonbelievers. God judges us more harshly than nonbelievers. Yet at the same time, God reminds us that He still loves us when we are disobedient. He wants us to know that He is still on the throne, even when things are falling apart.
 - ii) In the same way God made unconditional promises to the Israelites, the New Testament is full of unconditional promises to believers. We are trusting in God's goodness, not ours. At the same time, we have accountability as God's witnesses.
 - iii) Imagine committing some sin and suffering the consequences here on earth. This may not affect your salvation, but it does affect the "here and now". Imagine if God used some "pretty rotten" person or group to instill some punishment upon you. You may ask, "Yeah, I deserve that, but what about "them"? They're worse than me and God's not punishing them!" God silently answers, "Don't worry about them. I'll take care of them. You get back to doing what is right."
 - iv) That is what we see in these three chapters. We will read of punishment on the Philistines. Yet in some ways, it appears less severe than what happens to the Israelites. Again, it is because God held the Israelites (and us!) to a higher standard. God is fair in his judgment. A nonbeliever today will pay for eternity for ignoring God. In the meantime, God is "primarily" concerned with maturing us as He is preparing us for eternity with Him.
 - v) If we realize that God is punishing us more severely than say a nonbeliever who is "getting away with it", know that it is happening because God loves us and wants the best for us. God is working on us and wants the best for us.
 - vi) Further, one cannot lose their salvation if they continue to believe in Jesus as Lord, and entrust our lives to Him. We get punished for disobedience here on earth, but note that this punishment is temporary and designed to mature us. That is also the underlying lesson we read in these three chapters.

- f) OK, we're going to get through three chapters and I mean it. ☺ Let's get started.
2. After the Philistines had captured the ark of God, they took it from Ebenezer to Ashdod.² Then they carried the ark into Dagon's temple and set it beside Dagon.³ When the people of Ashdod rose early the next day, there was Dagon, fallen on his face on the ground before the ark of the LORD! They took Dagon and put him back in his place.⁴ But the following morning when they rose, there was Dagon, fallen on his face on the ground before the ark of the LORD! His head and hands had been broken off and were lying on the threshold; only his body remained.⁵ That is why to this day neither the priests of Dagon nor any others who enter Dagon's temple at Ashdod step on the threshold.
- a) Let me summarize what has just happened in this paragraph:
- i) The Philistines and the Israelites fought a battle in a town named Ebenezer.
 - ii) The Philistines won. They captured the ark of God.
 - iii) The Philistines moved the ark to a Philistine-controlled town named Ashdod.
 - iv) The main Philistine god is called Dagon. They had temples to Dagon.
 - v) The ark was placed in a temple as a trophy to Dagon.
 - vi) The next day, the Philistines found the Dagon statue on its face before the ark.
 - vii) The Philistines propped up the Dagon statue again.
 - viii) The next day, the Dagon statue fell again, this time with its head/feet falling off.
- b) The Philistines took the trophy home to their god. Not once, but twice, their god fell on the face before the true God. Who says God doesn't have a sense of humor? ☺
- i) Just to make sure the Philistines got it, Dagon's heads and feet were cut off. In that culture, it was common to cut off the heads and/or hands of a dead king-enemy.
 - ii) You would think that would make the Philistines say, "Maybe this Hebrew God is more powerful than our god? We should find out more about him."
 - iii) The lesson there is people don't convert based on miracles. Jesus taught that in Luke 16:31. For people to change there has to be an internal desire to change before any sort of conversion, despite any evidence.
 - iv) Notice in the last verse above the Philistine priests refuse to step where their god Dagon had fallen down, out of respect for him. There is no comment about how the Jewish God is superior. They just "go about their business" as if it is ok for a god that "wins' some and loses' some". Personally, I want a God that wins all the time. ☺ One that is superior to all human idols.
 - v) This leads back to the opening theme. God still needs to show He is superior to all other gods and at the same time, teach His children a lesson about obedience. God "let" the Israelites be defeated in battle, but at the same time wouldn't stand for other gods being shown as superior.
3. Verse 6: The LORD's hand was heavy upon the people of Ashdod and its vicinity; he brought devastation upon them and afflicted them with tumors.⁷ When the men of Ashdod saw what was happening, they said, "The ark of the god of Israel must not stay here with us, because his hand is heavy upon us and upon Dagon our god."⁸ So they called together all the rulers of the Philistines and asked them, "What shall we do with the ark of the god of Israel?" They answered, "Have the ark of the god of Israel moved to Gath." So they moved the ark of the God of Israel.
- a) The Philistine residents of Ashdod still had the ark. Their own god statue fell before it. Now the citizens of Ashdod were being hurt by some sort of tumors.
- b) The King James translated the word "tumors" as "emerods". That is an Old English word for "hemorrhoids". That is a possible translation. It's as if God is saying, "Keeping my ark here is going to be a pain in the rear". ☺ The Hebrew word means "boils from within". Some commentators believe it was a bubonic plague.

- i) If it is a more severe sort of punishment like the bubonic plague, it sends a more powerful message that the true God is “not to be messed with”.
 - c) The good news for the Philistines is at least they understood that the Hebrew God was causing the problems. They weren’t that dense. They understood that Dagon falling before God was a sign. The whole town knew when they were struck with this disease that it has something to do with God in their presence.
 - d) What was the Philistine solution? “Get this thing out of town!” Verse 8 mentions moving the ark to Gath, which was another Philistine controlled town in Israel.
 - i) Notice what the Philistines didn’t say:
 - a) “You know, maybe we should repent before the God of Israel.”
 - b) “You know, maybe we should return that thing to the Israelites.”
 - c) My point is pride is the last thing to die. Despite the pain and death brought on by the tumors, they still refused to acknowledge the God of Israel as the true God. They still refused to acknowledge the Ark belonged to God’s chosen people. They still wanted to keep the thing as a trophy and sent it to another Philistine town.
 - d) The modern comparison would be a nonbeliever saying, “I really don’t care for all of that religious stuff. Just leave me alone and let me live my own life. I’m not bothering you, am I?” ☺ Even when the “plagues” of God inflict their life, (i.e., guilt over what they are doing), they simply desire to “get God out of town” as opposed to changing their lifestyle.
 - e) The application to a believer might be some aspect of your life where you don’t want God. There are times in all believers lives where we say, “OK God, I need you over here and over there, but I have this one spot covered myself and I don’t need your help.” It is often in our strong suit where God makes us stumble. I always think of Peter. Peter was known for boldness. Yet he had fear before a little girl denying who Jesus was.
4. Verse 9: But after they had moved it, the LORD's hand was against that city, throwing it into a great panic. He afflicted the people of the city, both young and old, with an outbreak of tumors.
- ¹⁰ So they sent the ark of God to Ekron. As the ark of God was entering Ekron, the people of Ekron cried out, "They have brought the ark of the god of Israel around to us to kill us and our people." ¹¹ So they called together all the rulers of the Philistines and said, "Send the ark of the god of Israel away; let it go back to its own place, or it will kill us and our people." For death had filled the city with panic; God's hand was very heavy upon it. ¹² Those who did not die were afflicted with tumors, and the outcry of the city went up to heaven.
- a) In these four verses we read of a third Philistine town:
 - i) In Verse 1, the Philistines moved the ark to a town named Ashdod.
 - ii) In Verse 8, the Philistines moved the ark to a town named Gath.
 - iii) Now in Verse 10, the Philistines moved the ark to a town named Ekron.
 - b) In each case, tumors (or hemorrhoids) plagued the Philistine city to a point where Philistine people were dying because of this plague.
 - c) The most important line in this verse is the last part of Verse 12. It says, “The outcry of the city went up to heaven.” It implies that God heard the cry of the Philistines. People often wonder if God cares about nonbelievers. That is not true. Here is my rebuttal:
 - i) “Say to them (Israelites), ‘As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live.’” (Ezekiel 33:11 NIV)

- ii) Here is Paul speaking to group of nonbelieving Gentiles: "Yet he (God) has not left himself without testimony: He has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons; he provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy." (Acts 14:17 NIV)
- iii) If God is a God-of-love, than He has a love for all of mankind. God by definition is perfect, and knows all things. If He is all knowing, then He knows in advance who will choose Him. To those like the Philistines with limited knowledge of the true God will be judged according to the knowledge they do have.
- iv) "Since earliest times men have seen the earth and sky and all God made, and have known of his existence and great eternal power. So they will have no excuse when they stand before God at Judgment Day." (Romans 1:20, The Living Bible)
- d) Notice Verse 11: The Philistines say, "God's hand was very heavy upon it".
 - i) They are starting to realize that the true God is more powerful than Dagon is.
 - ii) The reason the text says, "their (Philistine) outcry reached heaven" is that for the first time, the Philistines desire to repent to God.
 - iii) Grant it, it took death and pain to get to that point, but it was reached.
 - iv) Let's face it, God could have sent down some 100-foot tall angel and said, "OK fella's, enough is enough, send the ark back to Israel, now!" ☺
 - v) The point is God used this "method" to teach both the Philistines and the Israelites that God's presence is not to be messed with.
 - vi) This visual lesson is designed to teach nonbelievers as well as believers that God is in charge and His-will will be accomplished.
 - vii) The point to remember for us is, "How far does God have to go to get us to submit to His will? If it is God's desire for us to do something, He may not violate our free will, but He may make life miserable enough for us to a point where we realize that obedience to God is far greater than any other choice in life we may want. (I'll spare you another hemorrhoid pun here. ☺)
- 5. Chapter 6, Verse 1: When the ark of the LORD had been in Philistine territory seven months, ² the Philistines called for the priests and the diviners and said, "What shall we do with the ark of the LORD? Tell us how we should send it back to its place."
 - a) This series of events took place over seven months. The number "seven" is associated with "completeness". I also believe the time frame was literal.
 - b) Notice in Verse 2 the Philistines ask, "How we should send the ark back". It is their intent to send it back. What they are now asking their priests is for methodology.
- 6. Verse 3: They answered, "If you return the ark of the god of Israel, do not send it away empty, but by all means send guilt offering to him. Then you will be healed, and you will know why his hand has not been lifted from you."
 - a) Here's the modern translation of the guilt offering: "Gee I'm sorry for what I did. I can't make it up to you, but here's twenty bucks for you anyway." ☺ The idea of a guilt offering is to give something to take away the guilt you feel for committing that act.
 - b) Personally, I don't think God is impressed with guilt offerings as much as He is impressed with a desire to change your way of living and obedience. The bible does speak of guilt offerings in Leviticus 5-7. Jesus is the ultimate fulfillment of a guilt offering in that our acceptance of His payment does relieve our guilt for that sin as well as the sin itself.

7. Verse 4: The Philistines asked, "What guilt offering should we send to him?" They replied, "Five gold tumors and five gold rats, according to the number of the Philistine rulers, because the same plague has struck both you and your rulers.⁵ Make models of the tumors and of the rats that are destroying the country, and pay honor to Israel's god. Perhaps he will lift his hand from you and your gods and your land.⁶ Why do you harden your hearts as the Egyptians and Pharaoh did? When he treated them harshly, did they not send the Israelites out so they could go on their way?"
- a) There five towns in Israel controlled by the Philistines. Thus five statues were made.
 - b) These diviners told the Philistines to make models of rats and models of the tumors.
(How do you make a statue of a tumor, or a hemorrhoid anyway? ☺). What this probably means is that the plague was spread by rats, as the bubonic plague does. To make statues of the rats and the tumors is an acknowledge that they were aware of who God is and He is responsible for this plague.
 - c) What is interesting is the diviners said in Verse 5: "Perhaps he will lift his hand from you and your gods and your land". They did not say, "our god and our land".
 - i) Apparently these diviners and priests were not Philistines. They were not Jewish either as they describe the Hebrew God as if it belonged to someone else as well.
 - ii) In Verse 6, these diviners also knew their history. They knew how God destroyed the Egyptians. That was over 400 years prior to this event.
 - iii) So if these guys are occultists, why are they giving "correct advice" to Philistines?
 - a) If these guys are anti-God, why aren't they saying that the plague and the capture of the ark are just a coincidence?
 - b) Part of the answer is that they've learned their history lesson that the true God does rule over all other "gods". Even demons in hell acknowledge that God is in charge. Those demons refuse to serve God and do His will.
 - c) My point is that these diviners are not telling the Philistines to go convert to Judaism. ☺ They're telling them to give God a "guilt offering" and then go get on with their lives. That is what Satan will do to you. He is not as blunt to say to ignore God, but to just "give God a little lip service" and then back to your lives. It would like someone giving the bad advice of, "Just confess your sin and then you can go back to doing it again."
8. Verse 7: "Now then, get a new cart ready, with two cows that have calved and have never been yoked. Hitch the cows to the cart, but take their calves away and pen them up.⁸ Take the ark of the LORD and put it on the cart, and in a chest beside it put the gold objects you are sending back to him as a guilt offering. Send it on its way,⁹ but keep watching it. If it goes up to its own territory, toward Beth Shemesh, then the LORD has brought this great disaster on us. But if it does not, then we will know that it was not his hand that struck us and that it happened to us by chance."
- a) These diviners came up with an interesting plan. They said in effect, "Take two female cows that fairly recently had babies. Tie them to cart that has the ark and the statues of the golden rats and golden tumors. These same two cows must never have worked at a plow before. The natural instinct of those cows would be to turn around and go back to their kids. If the two cows start walking in the opposite direction of their children, toward the Israelite territory, then you'll know this was of God and not just a coincidence".
 - b) This leads to the question, "Can we test God"? Is it ok to say, "OK God, if you're real, let me put you to the test."
 - i) This question is a little tricky. First of all, we have to remember that God is in charge and we are not. God is under no obligation to any person, period.

- ii) There is a famous story in Judges called “Gideon’s fleece” (Judges 6-8). God asks Gideon to perform a specific task. To check if God really wants to do that, Gideon puts God to a series of tests to validate His instructions.
 - a) In Gideon’s case, God had already commanded him to do something and then Gideon tested God. Gideon out of his fear to execute that command, asks God to perform a series of tests to help strengthen his faith. Gideon went on to perform that task.
 - b) There is verse a Proverb that fits here: “I love those who love me, and those who seek me diligently will find me.” (Proverbs 8:17 NKJV).
 - c) I have found that with nonbelievers who are truly seeking after God, God does reveal Himself. It is rarely some sort of grand vision as much as it comes through “amazing coincidences” that lead people to God.
 - d) I have also found that new believers in God often test if “God is real”. God often answers those tests. It is not a guarantee, but I have seen it work. God is trying to mature our relationship with Him. As we mature, God wants us to “walk by faith and not by sight”. (2nd Corinthians 5:7). As we trust God more and more, He reveals Himself less and less. He wants us to trust us, and not use validations as a support step in order to be obedient.
 - iii) There is only one blunt place I know where God dares us to test Him. That is in giving of our finances to Him.
 - a) “Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, That there may be food in My house, And try Me now in this,” Says the LORD of hosts, “If I will not open for you the windows of heaven And pour out for you such blessing that there will not be room enough to receive it.” (Malachi 3:10 NIV)
 - b) God is saying in effect, “You want proof that I am real? Great, give me 10% of your take-home pay before any other expense and I’ll bless you financially.” God refuses to be debtor to any man. I have never seen anyone go broke by outgiving God.
 - c) Meanwhile, back to the Philistines. ☺
9. Verse 10: So they did this. They took two such cows and hitched them to the cart and penned up their calves. ¹¹ They placed the ark of the LORD on the cart and along with it the chest containing the gold rats and the models of the tumors. ¹² Then the cows went straight up toward Beth Shemesh, keeping on the road and lowing all the way; they did not turn to the right or to the left. The rulers of the Philistines followed them as far as the border of Beth Shemesh.
- a) Here is the miracle itself. The cows went straight to Beth Shemesh, which is the nearest Israelite town from the Philistines.
 - b) The leaders of the five Philistine cities all followed the cart and made sure this worked.
 - i) What gets me about the Philistines is that they “don’t learn anything” from this. We’ll read in the next chapter that they attack the Israelites in a matter of years. You would have thought this cow-miracle, let alone the tumor pain would have them fear the God of Israel.
 - ii) It goes to show that it takes a lot to change people’s hearts. Even defeat and miracles are often not enough to make people convert religions. What it usually takes is a positive encounter with God and the realization of our sinful nature. My point again is the miracles are not enough.

10. Verse 13: Now the people of Beth Shemesh were harvesting their wheat in the valley, and when they looked up and saw the ark, they rejoiced at the sight. ¹⁴ The cart came to the field of Joshua of Beth Shemesh, and there it stopped beside a large rock. The people chopped up the wood of the cart and sacrificed the cows as a burnt offering to the LORD. ¹⁵ The Levites took down the ark of the LORD, together with the chest containing the gold objects, and placed them on the large rock. On that day the people of Beth Shemesh offered burnt offerings and made sacrifices to the LORD. ¹⁶ The five rulers of the Philistines saw all this and then returned that same day to Ekron.
- a) The last paragraph focused on the miracle-cow-trip from the perspective of the Philistines. This paragraph focuses on the same event from the Israelite perspective.
 - b) The Israelites rejoiced over the return of the cart. They sacrificed the cows that made the delivery. (Is that the thanks the cows get for their service to God? ☺)
 - c) Notice there is no mention of what the Israelites did with the golden rats and tumors. (What do you do with those things anyway? ☺) The good news is the Israelites focused on obedience and gratitude to God. They gave an offering to God in gratitude.
 - d) Verse 16 mentions that the rulers of the Philistines saw all of this.
 - i) Notice the Israelites didn't say, "Well, look at these nice golden rats. We should thank the Philistines for making it for us."
 - ii) Notice the Israelites didn't say, "Well, that should teach the Philistines with messing with God. Serves them right for what they did!"
 - iii) What's my point? The point is once God is back in their life, their focus was back on God himself and not any actions by the Philistines. That is what God wants from us. God is saying here in effect, "Hey, let me worry about your enemies. My relationship is with my people. I want you (believers) to give your "all" to me. That is what is symbolized by a burnt sacrifice. To give a burnt sacrifice is to say all that we have belongs to God.
 - e) There is an important word-picture that ties back to my opening theme of our relationship with God and nonbelievers relationship with God.
 - i) First of all, God "returned" in the symbol of the ark returned to the Israelites.
 - ii) Did the Israelites do anything to deserve the ark to come back? No! Remember the reason God allowed the Philistines to capture the ark in the first place had to do with disobedience. There is no mention anywhere in the text that the Israelites ever repented of this sin.
 - f) This comes back to God's unconditional promises to the Nation of Israel and us.
 - i) On one hand, God made unconditional promises to the ancestors that God would never forsake them. On the other hand, God has to turn away from sin. Once there is sorrow and repentance, God is more than willing to come back. In a sense, here is God "coming back" on this ox cart.
 - ii) I'm going to argue that there is nothing the Israelites did to deserve God coming back. It is simply God's grace and His desire to forgive.
 - iii) My point here is God is always willing to come back to our life. More than anything else is that God desires a relationship with us. God is "outside the camp" looking for a chance to return.
 - iv) I would argue that even if the tumors never happened, even if say, the ark was transported a million miles away, the ark would come back? Why? Because God made promises that he would never forsake His people.
 - a) "For the LORD your God is a merciful God; he will not abandon or destroy you or forget the covenant with your forefathers, which he confirmed to them by oath." (Deut. 4:31 NIV)

11. Verse 17: These are the gold tumors the Philistines sent as a guilt offering to the LORD--one each for Ashdod, Gaza, Ashkelon, Gath and Ekron. ¹⁸ And the number of the gold rats was according to the number of Philistine towns belonging to the five rulers--the fortified towns with their country villages. The large rock, on which they set the ark of the LORD, is a witness to this day in the field of Joshua of Beth Shemesh.
- a) Before we move on in the story, there is another mention of the golden rats and tumors. The text mentions again the five towns in Israel that were controlled by the Philistines.
 - b) This text is a repeat statement from earlier in the chapter. Why mention this text again?
 - i) In the previous text was a mention of the celebration by the local Israelite townfolk over the return of the ark. It mentioned the five leaders of the Philistine towns witnessing the return and the sacrifice of the ark and the car.
 - ii) By why mention the golden rats and golden tumors again? I believe it is for the same reason the rock on which the ark was set is called "a witness to this day". What that meant is when 1st and 2nd Samuel were written, many years later, that rock still stands as a monument to this event.
 - iii) What is my point? My point is to remember what God has done for us!
 - a) When miracles do occur in our life, they are wonderful and should be remembered. Our problem is short-term memories. We forget quickly how God has worked in our lives in the past. We get our focus back on our problems and begin to worry again.
 - iv) The Israelites set up a rock of a memorial. God defeated the Philistines "all by Himself". God showed his power over all other forces without any help from the Israelites. God can do the same for us. God is saying to us, "turn your problems over to me. Let me deal with your issues.
 - a) "When a man's ways are pleasing to the LORD, he makes even his enemies live at peace with him." (Proverbs 16:7 NIV)
12. Verse 19: But God struck down some of the men of Beth Shemesh, putting seventy of them to death because they had looked into the ark of the LORD. The people mourned because of the heavy blow the LORD had dealt them, ²⁰ and the men of Beth Shemesh asked, "Who can stand in the presence of the LORD, this holy God? To whom will the ark go up from here?"
- a) We now move from happiness to disaster again. ☺
 - b) The Israelites after receiving the ark, sacrificing the cart and the cows, get struck down after they looked into the ark. OK, time for the big "why" question and answers:
 - i) First, let's remember what was in the ark. The ark is a wood box covered in gold. The lid of the box was a separate piece of furniture. The main item in the box was a copy of the 10 commandments. (Deuteronomy 10:2).
 - ii) First of all, God gave the commandment forbidding that anyone ever look at the ark, except the High Priest and only that was once per year (Numbers 4:20). It was a death sentence to look at the ark.
 - iii) The reason that God forbids that anyone look into the ark has to do with the concept of the "law". The covering of the ark is called the "mercy seat" (Exodus 25:17 KJV) as it represents God's mercy "covering" the requirements of the law. To remove the mercy seat is a word-picture of "going around God's mercy" to the law itself. That is why God set it up as a capital punishment.
 - c) Verse 19 says 70 men died because they looked into the ark.
 - i) The King James Bible says 50,000 and 70 men were killed. Modern translations argue only "70". There is evidence that "70" was correct including the 1st Century Jewish historian Josephus. The argument is that it was some sort of copyist error.

- ii) This reminds me to state that I believe the bible in its “original autograph” is the word of God. The number of controversial verses like this are very minimal and don’t affect any of the essential doctrines.
 - d) The rest of the text sort of follows. The people looked into the ark, which was forbidden. After 70 (or 50,070) were struck down, there is a great mourning over their actions.
 - e) The important point is God held the Israelites more accountable than the Philistines when they had the ark. There is no mention whether or not the Philistines ever looked in the ark. They probably did out of curiosity. Yet the Israelites were held to a higher standard because they were supposed to know God’s laws and God’s requirements.
 - i) These verses again show a good balance of God’s unconditional promises and at the same time show God’s standards for accountability. That is only for the Israelites, but for us as well. God loves us unconditionally and as long as we’re trusting in Jesus we cannot lose our salvation. At the same time, if we are God’s witnesses, there is a sense of accountability and a higher standard for believers.
13. Verse 21: Then they sent messengers to the people of Kiriath Jearim, saying, "The Philistines have returned the ark of the LORD. Come down and take it up to your place." ^{Chapter 7, Verse 1} So the men of Kiriath Jearim came and took up the ark of the LORD. They took it to Abinadab's house on the hill and consecrated Eleazar his son to guard the ark of the LORD.
- a) The local residents didn’t want the ark there, after all the death that occurred, so they took it to Kiriath Jearim, which was a nearby town.
 - b) When you read the historical commentaries, there is no known reason why the ark was taken to this place. This town was not a city controlled by the Levitical priests. It may have been the nearest major town. The previous home of the tabernacle prior to this was a town called Shiloh. That is where the ark was before it was taken into battle in 1st Samuel Chapter 4. There is a theory that when the Philistines won that battle in Chapter 4, they may have destroyed that town, and thus, the ark was “just” taken to this place.
 - c) In summary, the Israelites took the ark to this town, picked some guy named “Abinadab” and said, “You take care of this thing”. It is not known what kind of guy this was, but we don’t read of him being struck dead, so at the least we know he treated the ark properly.
14. Verse 2: It was a long time, twenty years in all, that the ark remained at Kiriath Jearim, and all the people of Israel mourned and sought after the LORD. ³ And Samuel said to the whole house of Israel, "If you are returning to the LORD with all your hearts, then rid yourselves of the foreign gods and the Ashtoreths and commit yourselves to the LORD and serve him only, and he will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines." ⁴ So the Israelites put away their Baals and Ashtoreths, and served the LORD only.
- a) A natural question to wonder during this time frame is “What happened to Samuel”? Verse 2 says the ark remained in that town for 20 years. Where was Samuel at that time?
 - b) The important thing to notice here is Verse 2 where it says, “the people of Israel mourned and sought after the LORD.”
 - i) Remember the Israelites were still dealing with the war defeat from the Philistines. Chapters 5-6 focused on the Philistines and the ark. These chapters only covered a 7-month time frame. In Chapter 4, thousands of Israelites soldiers were killed.
 - ii) In order to have a religious revival, the first thing needed is mourning. I’m saying it is a “good thing” that the Israelites were mourning and seeking after God.
 - iii) For someone to be forgiven of their sins, first they have to realize they sinned!

- iv) Unfortunately, people often have to hit “rock bottom” before they turn to God. Sometimes the reason God allows tragedies is that it gets people to turn to God. It is almost as if God responds to those prayers as, “Well, good to hear from you. It’s been awhile.” ☺ For the Israelites, it took the tragedy of a lost war to get them to collectively turn back to God.
 - v) One of my favorite prayers during difficult times is “Lord, let not this lesson be wasted. Help me to understand the purpose of it so I can learn from it”.
 - c) With Israel mourning, Samuel goes out and gives a good “fire and brimstone” sermon. ☺
 - i) Samuel goes around saying in effect, “OK folks, you want God back ruling over your life? Terrific. Let’s start by talking the other little gods you have in your life (“foreign gods and the Ashtoreths) and throwing them away.”
 - ii) That particular message has not changed today. The message today is to the effect of, “OK folks, you want to have Jesus rule over your life? Great, let’s start by taking your love for other things more than God and getting rid of them.”
 - iii) Everyone has a god. If you want to find out what someone’s “god” is, look where they spend their spare time and spare income. I’m not anti-hobby. This is about making things a priority over God. If that is the case, we (yes we) have to regularly examine our lives and look at what are our priorities.
 - iv) I once heard a pastor say, “God does not want to be #1 on a list of 10. God wants to be #1 on a list of one.” That is the message Samuel is preaching as well.
15. Verse 5: Then Samuel said, "Assemble all Israel at Mizpah and I will intercede with the LORD for you." ⁶ When they had assembled at Mizpah, they drew water and poured it out before the LORD. On that day they fasted and there they confessed, "We have sinned against the LORD." And Samuel was leader of Israel at Mizpah.
- a) Samuel got the revival tent going. ☺
 - i) There is now a large collection of people assembled in Mizpah.
 - ii) They drew water and poured it before God. This is a desert community and water is a precious resource. This act shows their trust and dependence upon God. It is a word-picture of “pouring everything I am out before God”.
 - b) “This (Mizpah) was the place where Jacob separated from Laban (Genesis 31:49), and was the gathering place for a repentant Israel in Judges 20:1. This was a place remembered for separation and repentance.” David Guzik.
 - c) This is a good point to talk about confession:
 - i) Confession of one’s sins can be done privately or collectively as a group as done here. There are no rules as to how confession is done as long as it is sincerely. The important aspect of confession is the desire to change for the better.
 - d) Here we read of Samuel the leader. The Hebrew word is same word used for “judge”, but it represents the spiritual leader, even though Samuel was not the High Priest.
16. Verse 7: When the Philistines heard that Israel had assembled at Mizpah, the rulers of the Philistines came up to attack them. And when the Israelites heard of it, they were afraid because of the Philistines. ⁸ They said to Samuel, "Do not stop crying out to the LORD our God for us, that he may rescue us from the hand of the Philistines." ⁹ Then Samuel took a suckling lamb and offered it up as a whole burnt offering to the LORD. He cried out to the LORD on Israel's behalf, and the LORD answered him.
- a) First of all, let’s talk about the Philistines and their short-term memory. ☺ They are getting ready to attack the Israelites again even after the plagues hit them.

- i) It's been 20 years since the tumors and the rats. Now their thinking, "OK, we remember the part of how we defeated the Israelites last time. Let's just not capture that ark thing anymore." ☺
 - ii) A chapter or two ago, God' stirs up Israel's enemies in order to teach Israel a lesson. Now that Israel has repented and is seeking God, God is "stirring up" the Philistines again, but this time, in order to defeat them. Were the Philistines aware of this? Of course not. It simply shows how God is working behind the scenes in ways we cannot comprehend.
 - b) Now let's talk about this from the Israelite perspective.
 - i) When the Israelites heard this, their first reaction was not to get the soldiers ready, but to turn to God for protection. That is what God seeks from us during times of battle. I'm sure the Israelites still got physically ready for battle. The point is they sought God first for protection.
 - ii) That is how we deal with our battles, be it physical or something else. God desires we turn to Him first in prayer. Then we go out and do our preparation.
 - iii) Samuel offered a lamb as a burnt offering. A lamb is an innocent, harmless animal. Yes there is the "Jesus as a Lamb of God" symbolism, but there is also the idea of 100% trusting in God for the results.
17. Verse 10: While Samuel was sacrificing the burnt offering, the Philistines drew near to engage Israel in battle. But that day the LORD thundered with loud thunder against the Philistines and threw them into such a panic that they were routed before the Israelites. ¹¹ The men of Israel rushed out of Mizpah and pursued the Philistines, slaughtering them along the way to a point below Beth Car.
- a) Here the Israelites sought God first, and then God got the Philistines to go into a panic. The next thing you know the Israelites are chasing them and wiping them out as they go.
 - b) What is important is to compare this result to what happened three chapters ago:
 - i) In Chapter 4, the Israelites didn't seek God. They took the ark along as a good luck charm, and got slaughtered.
 - ii) The good news is that they learned their lesson. This time they sought God first. What is happening is God's reputation is on the line more than the Israelites. God promised protection if the Israelites sought Him with all of their heart.
 - a) "When you go into battle in your own land against an enemy who is oppressing you, sound a blast on the trumpets. Then you will be remembered by the LORD your God and rescued from your enemies." (Numbers 10:9 NIV) The point of this verse is not that there is something special about a trumpet blast, but that God promises to protect His people when they seek Him with all of their heart.
 - c) Some of the best prayers we can pray is when we count on God's promises to come true. Let me give you an example: "Lord, I'm in a lot of trouble right now. I don't see how I can get out of this situation. But I know that you are bigger than this problem. You promised never to leave me nor forsake me and I'm trusting in that right now, Amen".
 - i) I believe God loves to answer prayers that are dependant upon His promises!
18. Verse 12: Then Samuel took a stone and set it up between Mizpah and Shen. He named it Ebenezer, saying, "Thus far has the LORD helped us." ¹³ So the Philistines were subdued and did not invade Israelite territory again.
- a) The key point is Samuel set up a monument. The translation of the Hebrew name for the sign means "Thus far the LORD (all caps = "Jehovah") has helped us.

- b) If I was your average Israelite watching this, my first reaction would be, “Wait a minute, what’s this “thus far” business? What do you mean God has helped us “thus far?” Is there another monument anywhere called “God-will-always-help-us?”
- i) Samuel’s point is not that “you can depend upon God sometimes, and not others”.
 - ii) Samuel’s point is (here it comes again) there is an aspect of accountability to God that is up to us and not to God. As a Christian, we can’t just say, “I believe in God and now my life will be perfect and wonderful and I’ll never have a bad moment again”. If that were the case, people would come to God for the “fringe benefits” and not for a relationship.
 - iii) Samuel wants the Israelites to understand that God is always willing to help his people, but at the price of obedience. I have to be careful what I say here. I do not mean that we can control God by our behavior. My point is that if we are obedient to what God commands us to do, and our trust is in God, we can count on God to come through because again, it is His reputation on the line, not ours.
19. Verse 13, cont.: Throughout Samuel's lifetime, the hand of the LORD was against the Philistines. ¹⁴ The towns from Ekron to Gath that the Philistines had captured from Israel were restored to her, and Israel delivered the neighboring territory from the power of the Philistines. And there was peace between Israel and the Amorites.
- a) During the lifetime of Samuel, you never read again of the rise of the Philistines. They did trouble Israel a little after Samuel’s death as we’ll read later in the book, but they never controlled a portion of Israel like they did in the Book of Judges or the early chapters here in 1st Samuel.
 - b) The last part of Verse 14 says, essentially, “Oh yea, and there was also peace between Israel and one of its neighbors the Amorites.”
 - i) There has been no mention of this nation anywhere else in 1st Samuel. There is no recorded war since Judges Chapter 11, which was centuries ago.
 - ii) The point of this verse is that “When God blesses, it is greater than expected”. It is an example of God’s grace. It is God saying, “I’m so proud of you for what you are doing. Tell you what, not only will I give you peace with the Philistines, but I’ll also take care of all the other surrounding nations. I promised you peace from your enemies and I meant it!”
20. Verse 15: Samuel continued as judge over Israel all the days of his life. ¹⁶ From year to year he went on a circuit from Bethel to Gilgal to Mizpah, judging Israel in all those places. ¹⁷ But he always went back to Ramah, where his home was, and there he also judged Israel. And he built an altar there to the LORD.
- a) This verse marks the end of the focus on Samuel. Beginning in chapter 8, the focus is primarily on King Saul. Samuel is still involved in a good portion of the book as God uses Samuel to anoint both King Saul and King David.
 - b) In a sense, this verse is an “epilogue” to Samuel’s life. He went from a little boy left at the House of God to the leader of Israel. He is the “bridge” between the era of Judges and the era of the Kings that begins in the next chapter.
 - c) These verses describe how Samuel spent the rest of his life in a “traveling circuit” judging Israel (i.e., giving sermons, making decisions like a judge, etc.).
 - d) The last verse is the fact he built an altar to the LORD in his hometown of Ramah.
 - i) The secret of Samuel’s success is his full dependence upon God no matter what the circumstances. Remember Samuel was raised in a time of corruption of the High Priest and corruption of the people. Despite that, Samuel was used by God to bring “revival” back to the land. Samuel’s secret was his utter dependence upon God and not his own ego. That is why the text emphasizes the altar he built.

21. OK, three chapters in a week. I believe this a record. ☺ I did it this way as Chapter 8 beings a new section. Let's pray: Heavenly Father, we are reminded that as we live for You, it is Your reputation on the line in our lives. Help us to draw upon Your strength and Your power and more importantly, Your love as we live for You. Keep us close to you so that we may be your witnesses to others. Further, during the moments when we too have "lost a major battle", help us to turn to you for understanding of what lessons you want us to learn in those situations that those lessons not be wasted. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.