

## Do Not Harden Your Hearts: The LORD is “at Hand” (1 Samuel 6:1-12)

### 1. The Catastrophe (5:6-12)

- The ark has been in Philistine country for seven months. God’s glory has been on display at Ashdod, Gath and Ekron.
- Tumors were inflicted at Ashdod, Gath, and Ekron (v.6, 9, 12). As the ark was transported from Ashdod to Gath, the tumors became more widespread and increased in severity. At Gath, tumors broke the skin and affected both the young and the old (v.9).
- Widespread fear and panic increased the longer the ark lingered in Philistine country. It was called “great” (v.6), “exceedingly great” (v.9), and finally “exceedingly heavy” (v.11). Dagon’s hands were cut off, yet the LORD’s hand was heavy upon the Philistines.
- Although death was not mentioned at Ashdod or Gath, in Ekron it appears as though there was a new judgment: death.
- There was an outbreak of mice which would have ravished the Philistine crop, causing starvation.

### 2. The Consultation (v.1-2)

- Political activism and bureaucracy have not changed the climate in Philistine country. The Philistine lords did not return the ark immediately because: they did not know what to do (this has never happened to them before) - or - they still think that they can manipulate and use the ark to their advantage.
- Their next step is to summon their priests and diviners for counsel. These were a class of religious leaders that the Israelites were forbidden to consult (Deut. 18:10, 14).

### 3. The Charge and its Contents (v.3-6)

- The priests and diviners recommend a “guilt offering.” This guilt offering would indicate that the Philistines recognize that they have offended a deity; the LORD.
- The guilt offering included five golden tumors and five golden mice. Through this offering, they believe they are giving reparations to the LORD and paying their debt, so He will relinquish the judgments that have fallen on them. These 10 images would have been placed in a box next to the ark of God (v.8).
- Four major problems with this “guilt offering:”
  - The golden images were a violation of the first and second commandment (Deut. 5: 7-10)
  - Mice are among the ritual detestable animals that God forbade to be used in offering (Lev. 11:29)
  - The Mosaic Law prescribed a ram without blemish to be slain (Lev. 5:15)

- They believe that the requirements for “getting right with God” are reparations, rather than a transfer of guilt onto a substitute, in faith.

The priests and diviners are not convinced that the Philistines will follow through and that the God of Israel will lighten His hand (v.5). The Philistines were “stiff necked” and were warned not to be like the Egyptians. Ironically, they are going to be giving their gold to the Israelites, who had plundered the Egyptians (Exodus 12:35-36).

The Philistines should have consulted an Israelite priest if they wanted to worship the LORD in the right way. Instead, they consulted their own pagan religious leaders.

### 4. The Cart and the Cows (v.7-12)

- The priests and diviners suggest that a new cart be built to transport the ark, along with the guilt offering, back to Israelite territory.
- New cart (v.7): this would avoid any extra offense to the God of Israel since it has not been previously used for anything else; it was a sign of respect.
- Two milch cows: These would be “milk” cows that would be heavy with milk, and have hungry, feeding calves.

The milk cows were an ingenious and brilliant way to “test” the God of Israel. They are trying to “stack the odds.” How?

- These dairy cows are heavy with milk and need to feed their calves
- They are separated from their young calves
- They are yoked for the first time to one another
- They have never pulled a cart before, let alone the additional weight of gold
- They must stay straight for a destination that is 7 miles away without turning to the right or the left
- They are lowing the whole time

The priests and diviners are not asking for spiritual discernment. Instead, they are demanding that God supernaturally override the natural instinct of the cows so they can be certain that the hand of the God of Israel has brought about the catastrophe in their country.

The priests and diviners tell the Philistines not to harden their hearts, yet they are testing the LORD. The LORD was gracious to the Philistines in causing the cows to behave contrary to their nature.

Despite our natural inclinations and our sinful dispositions, God in Christ has caused many to be “born again.” God singularly has changed the hearts of many.

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