

**1Samuel 6:1 ¶ And the ark of the LORD was in the country of the Philistines seven months.**

**1Samuel 6:2 And the Philistines called for the priests and the diviners, saying, What shall we do to the ark of the LORD? tell us wherewith we shall send it to his place.**

**1Samuel 6:3 And they said, If ye send away the ark of the God of Israel, send it not empty; but in any wise return him a trespass offering: then ye shall be healed, and it shall be known to you why his hand is not removed from you.**

Continuing directly in context from the previous chapter...

The ark of the LORD was in Philistine land for seven months before they decided to send it back home because they considered it a curse. They called for their “religious leaders” and asked how they should go about sending the ark back to Israel. Their leaders told them not to send it back empty; they should include a trespass offering to appease the God of Israel. They reasoned that when the people were healed, they would know that they had done the right thing.

The NIV Commentary offers this insight: “Ancient religious protocol mandated that the worshiper not approach his god(s) empty-handed. Thus the Philistine priests and diviners advised that a guilt offering accompany the ark back to Israel.”

**1Samuel 6:4 Then said they, What *shall be* the trespass offering which we shall return to him? They answered, Five golden emerods, and five golden mice, *according to* the number of the lords of the Philistines: for one plague *was* on you all, and on your lords.**

**1Samuel 6:5 Wherefore ye shall make images of your emerods, and images of your mice that mar the land; and ye shall give glory unto the God of Israel: peradventure he will lighten his hand from off you, and from off your gods, and from off your land.**

**1Samuel 6:6 Wherefore then do ye harden your hearts, as the Egyptians and Pharaoh hardened their hearts? when he had wrought wonderfully among them, did they not let the people go, and they departed?**

The people then asked what they should send as a trespass offering. Their leaders told them to send five golden emerods and five golden mice, representative of the five lords of the Philistines. They reasoned that by honoring the God of Israel in this way, He would take away His hand of judgment against their people, gods and lands.

Guzik offers this insight regarding the choice of mice: “We know the plague involved tumors. We were not told in 1 Samuel 5 that the plague involved rats. Some think the tumors were the result of bubonic plague, carried by rats. Others think the rats were part of another plague or calamity mentioned in 1 Samuel 5:11: *For there was a deadly destruction throughout all the city; the hand of God was very heavy there.*”

Their religious leaders encouraged them to be smarter than the Egyptians had

been. The Pharaoh had refused to recognize the mighty hand of God at work among them. They noted that in the end, despite Pharaoh's obstinacy, the people of Israel left. Implied—and the Egyptians had suffered unnecessarily because of his obstinacy.

These leaders at least recognized that if what they were experiencing was due to the mighty hand of judgment of the God of Israel, they were powerless against Him. It was better to yield now than to continue to suffer.

If only the people of the world today were as smart. God has provided so much evidence testifying to His authority over creation, yet untold millions refuse to believe the truth that surrounds them and is implanted in their very being.

*Romans 1:19–20 "Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse:"*

**1Samuel 6:7** Now therefore make a new cart, and take two milch kine, on which there hath come no yoke, and tie the kine to the cart, and bring their calves home from them:

**1Samuel 6:8** And take the ark of the LORD, and lay it upon the cart; and put the jewels of gold, which ye return him for a trespass offering, in a coffer by the side thereof; and send it away, that it may go.

**1Samuel 6:9** And see, if it goeth up by the way of his own coast to Bethshemesh, then he hath done us this great evil: but if not, then we shall know that *it is* not his hand that smote us: it *was* a chance that happened to us.

The Philistine leaders told their people to make a new cart and get two milk cows that had birthed calves and had never been yoked before to pull the cart. They were to take the calves back to their homes. Then they were to put the ark of the LORD on the cart and put the gold trespass offering in a box and place it next to the ark. They were then to send the cart on its way. If the cows took the way to Bethshemesh, it would indicate that their judgment had come from the God of Israel; if not, they would know that all that had happened was just bad luck.

**1Samuel 6:10** ¶ And the men did so; and took two milch kine, and tied them to the cart, and shut up their calves at home:

**1Samuel 6:11** And they laid the ark of the LORD upon the cart, and the coffer with the mice of gold and the images of their emerods.

**1Samuel 6:12** And the kine took the straight way to the way of Bethshemesh, and went along the highway, lowing as they went, and turned not aside to the right hand or to the left; and the lords of the Philistines went after them unto the border of Bethshemesh.

The men did as they had been instructed and sent the cart on its way. Instead of heading back home to their calves, as would have been natural, the cows immediately took the way to Bethshemesh bellowing the whole way but never turning aside from the highway. I think their bellowing testified to the fact that

they would rather have gone home to their calves. The lords of the Philistines followed the cart all the way to the border of Bethshemesh.

I believe this was due to the authority that the LORD exerted over those cows. No, the plan was not of His making; but the leaders presented it to their people in such a way as to testify to His authority over the situation. It was for the honor of His name that He chose to have the cows bring the ark back home to Israel. Ezekiel reiterates this principle regarding the LORD's dealings with the nation of Israel.

*Ezekiel 20:44 "And ye shall know that I am the LORD, when I have wrought with you for my name's sake, not according to your wicked ways, nor according to your corrupt doings, O ye house of Israel, saith the Lord GOD."*

**1Samuel 6:13** And they of Bethshemesh were reaping their wheat harvest in the valley: and they lifted up their eyes, and saw the ark, and rejoiced to see it.  
**1Samuel 6:14** And the cart came into the field of Joshua, a Bethshemite, and stood there, where *there was* a great stone: and they clave the wood of the cart, and offered the kine a burnt offering unto the LORD.

The people of Bethshemesh were reaping the wheat harvest when they caught sight of the ark. The cart came to a field belonging to a man named Joshua and stopped by a great stone. The harvesters used the wood from the cart and the cows to make a burnt offering to the LORD.

**1Samuel 6:15** And the Levites took down the ark of the LORD, and the coffer that *was* with it, wherein the jewels of gold *were*, and put *them* on the great stone: and the men of Bethshemesh offered burnt offerings and sacrificed sacrifices the same day unto the LORD.

**1Samuel 6:16** And when the five lords of the Philistines had seen *it*, they returned to Ekron the same day.

Bethshemesh was a city that had been given to the Levites. The Levites took charge of the ark of the LORD and the box of gold images and put them on the great rock while the men to Bethshemesh made their offerings and sacrifices unto the LORD.

The five lords of the Philistines evidently stayed long enough to witness the offerings and sacrifices before returning to Ekron that same day.

**1Samuel 6:17** And these *are* the golden emerods which the Philistines returned *for* a trespass offering unto the LORD; for Ashdod one, for Gaza one, for Askelon one, for Gath one, for Ekron one;

**1Samuel 6:18** And the golden mice, *according to* the number of all the cities of the Philistines *belonging to* the five lords, *both* of fenced cities, and of country villages, even unto the great stone of Abel, whereon they set down the ark of the LORD: *which stone remaineth* unto this day in the field of Joshua, the Bethshemite.

It is noted that the golden emerods represented the five main Philistine cities—Ashdod, Gaza, Askelon, Gath and Ekron. The golden mice represented the kingdoms of the five lords of the Philistines.

Though the KJV wording of verse 18 is confusing, other translations clarify that the author was just noting that the great rock in the field of Joshua upon which they placed the ark of the LORD still stood in testimony to this event in the field of Joshua the Bethshemite at the time this record was made.

**1Samuel 6:19 ¶ And he smote the men of Bethshemesh, because they had looked into the ark of the LORD, even he smote of the people fifty thousand and threescore and ten men: and the people lamented, because the LORD had smitten *many* of the people with a great slaughter.**

**1Samuel 6:20 And the men of Bethshemesh said, Who is able to stand before this holy LORD God? and to whom shall he go up from us?**

**1Samuel 6:21 And they sent messengers to the inhabitants of Kirjathjearim, saying, The Philistines have brought again the ark of the LORD; come ye down, *and* fetch it up to you.**

The Levites should have known the proper protocol for handling the ark but evidently did not follow the protocol because the LORD killed 50,070 men of Bethshemesh because they had dishonored the LORD by looking into the ark. The people mourned greatly over the death of these men. All of a sudden, they wanted to get rid of the ark. So they sent a delegation to Kirjathjearim (about ten miles north of Bethshemesh) telling them that the Philistines had returned the ark of the LORD and asking them to come and get it.

It should be noted that many commentaries note that there must be a corruption in the text regarding the number of men killed in such a small town. Some note that the number is 5,070 and some even just 70 out of a larger population. The significant point is that the LORD held the people accountable to honor the ark that represented His presence among the people, and judged them harshly for treating it with dishonor.

I am reminded that we who are true followers of Jesus today are privileged to have the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Our body is the temple of the Holy Spirit. Should that not give us great pause about acting in any way so as to dishonor His presence in our lives?

*1 Corinthians 6:19–20 “What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God’s.”*