



Handling the Holy: What do you do with the Glory of God? (1 Sam 6-7)

Notes: Week Five

1 Samuel 6-7 (HCSB)

The Return of the Ark

⁶ When the ark of the LORD had been in the land of the Philistines for seven months, ² the Philistines summoned the priests and the diviners and pleaded, “What should we do with the ark of the LORD? Tell us how we can send it back to its place.”

³ They replied, “If you send the ark of Israel’s God away, you must not send it without an offering. You must send back a restitution offering to Him, and you will be healed. Then the reason His hand hasn’t been removed from you will be revealed.”^[a]

⁴ They asked, “What restitution offering should we send back to Him?”

And they answered, “Five gold tumors and five gold mice corresponding to the number of Philistine rulers, since there was one plague for both you^[b] and your rulers. ⁵ Make images of your tumors and of your mice that are destroying the land. Give glory to Israel’s God, and perhaps He will stop oppressing you,^[c] your gods, and your land. ⁶ Why harden your hearts as the Egyptians and Pharaoh hardened theirs? When He afflicted them, didn’t they send Israel away, and Israel left?

⁷ “Now then, prepare one new cart and two milk cows that 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, place it on the cart, and put the gold objects that you’re sending Him as a restitution offering in a box beside the ark. Send it off and let it go its way. ⁹ Then watch: If it goes up the road to its homeland toward Beth-shemesh, it is the LORD who has made this terrible trouble for us. However, if it doesn’t, we will know that it was not His hand that punished us—it was just something that happened to us by chance.”

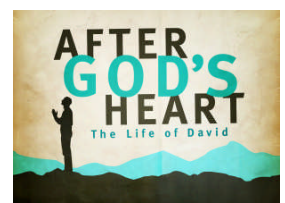
¹⁰ The men did this: They took two milk cows, hitched them to the cart, and confined their calves in the pen. ¹¹ Then they put the ark of the LORD on the cart, along with the box containing the gold mice and the images of their tumors. ¹² The cows went straight up the road to Beth-shemesh. They stayed on that one highway, lowing as they went; they never strayed to the right or to the left. The Philistine rulers were walking behind them to the territory of Beth-shemesh.

¹³ The people of Beth-shemesh were harvesting wheat in the valley, and when they looked up and saw the ark, they were overjoyed to see it. ¹⁴ The cart came to the field of Joshua of Beth-shemesh and stopped there near a large rock. The people of the city chopped up the cart and offered the cows as a burnt offering to the LORD. ¹⁵ The Levites removed the ark of the LORD, along with the box containing the gold objects, and placed them on the large rock. That day the men of Beth-shemesh offered burnt offerings and made sacrifices to the LORD. ¹⁶ When the five Philistine rulers observed this, they returned to Ekron that same day.

¹⁷ As a restitution offering to the LORD, the Philistines had sent back one gold tumor for each city: Ashdod, Gaza, Ashkelon, Gath, and Ekron. ¹⁸ The number of gold mice also corresponded to the number of Philistine cities of the five rulers, the fortified cities and the outlying villages. The large rock^[d] on which the ark of the LORD was placed is in the field of Joshua of Beth-shemesh to this day.

¹⁹ God struck down the men of Beth-shemesh because they looked inside the ark of the LORD.^[e] He struck down 70 men out of 50,000 men.^[f] The people mourned because the LORD struck them with a great slaughter. ²⁰ The men of Beth-shemesh asked, “Who is able to stand in the presence of this holy LORD God? Who should the ark go to from here?”

²¹ They sent messengers to the residents of Kiriath-jearim, saying, “The Philistines have returned the ark of the LORD. Come down and get it.”^[g]



7 So the men of Kiriath-jearim came for the ark of the LORD and took it to Abinadab's house on the hill. They consecrated his son Eleazar to take care of it.

Victory at Mizpah

² Time went by until 20 years had passed since the ark had been taken to Kiriath-jearim. Then the whole house of Israel began to seek the LORD. ³ Samuel told them, "If you are returning to the LORD with all your heart, get rid of the foreign gods and the Ashtoreths that are among you, dedicate yourselves to ^[h]the LORD, and worship only Him. Then He will rescue you from the hand of the Philistines." ⁴ So the Israelites removed the Baals and the Ashtoreths and only worshiped the LORD.

⁵ Samuel said, "Gather all Israel at Mizpah, and I will pray to the LORD on your behalf." ⁶ When they gathered at Mizpah, they drew water and poured it out in the LORD's presence. They fasted that day, and there they confessed, "We have sinned against the LORD." And Samuel judged the Israelites at Mizpah.

⁷ When the Philistines heard that the Israelites had gathered at Mizpah, their rulers marched up toward Israel. When the Israelites heard about it, they were afraid because of the Philistines. ⁸ The Israelites said to Samuel, "Don't stop crying out to the LORD our God for us, so that He will save us from the hand of the Philistines."

⁹ Then Samuel took a young lamb and offered it as a whole burnt offering to the LORD. He cried out to the LORD on behalf of Israel, and the LORD answered him. ¹⁰ Samuel was offering the burnt offering as the Philistines drew near to fight against Israel. The LORD thundered loudly against the Philistines that day and threw them into such confusion that they fled before Israel. ¹¹ Then the men of Israel charged out of Mizpah and pursued the Philistines striking them down all the way to a place below Beth-car.

¹² Afterward, Samuel took a stone and set it upright between Mizpah and Shen. He named it Ebenezer, ^[i] explaining, "The LORD has helped us to this point." ¹³ So the Philistines were subdued and ^[i] did not invade Israel's territory again. The LORD's hand was against the Philistines all of Samuel's life. ¹⁴ The cities from Ekron to Gath, which they had taken from Israel, were restored; Israel even rescued their surrounding territories from Philistine control. There was also peace between Israel and the Amorites.

¹⁵ Samuel judged Israel throughout his life. ¹⁶ Every year he would go on a circuit to Bethel, Gilgal, and Mizpah and would judge Israel at all these locations. ¹⁷ Then he would return to Ramah because his home was there, he judged Israel there, and he built an altar to the LORD there.

Footnotes:

- a. [1 Samuel 6:3](#) DSS, LXX read *healed, and an atonement shall be made for you. Shouldn't His hand be removed from you?*
- b. [1 Samuel 6:4](#) Some Hb mss, LXX; other Hb mss read *them*
- c. [1 Samuel 6:5](#) Lit *will lighten the heaviness of His hand from you*
- d. [1 Samuel 6:18](#) Some Hb mss, DSS, LXX, Tg; other Hb mss read *meadow*
- e. [1 Samuel 6:19](#) LXX reads *But the sons of Jeconiah did not rejoice with the men of Beth-shemesh when they saw the ark of the LORD.*
- f. [1 Samuel 6:19](#) Some Hb mss, Josephus read *70 men*; other Hb mss read *50,070 men*
- g. [1 Samuel 6:21](#) Lit *and bring it up to you*
- h. [1 Samuel 7:3](#) Lit *you and set your hearts on*
- i. [1 Samuel 7:12](#) = Stone of Help
- j. [1 Samuel 7:13](#) LXX reads *The LORD humbled the Philistines and they*

Holman Christian Standard Bible - Study Bible¹

1 Samuel 6-7

6:1 The allusion to seven months dates the battle that resulted in the ark's capture to around late October, since the wheat harvest ([v. 13](#)) typically occurred around late May.

6:2 Priests and... diviners represented the Philistines' religious authorities. Diviners were prohibited by the law of Moses ([Dt 18:10,14](#)) because they attempted to discern the will of the divine apart from the methods God had prescribed.

6:3 A restitution offering applied to situations where holy things (here the ark) became defiled ([Lv 5:15](#)).

6:4 The five gold tumors and five gold mice do not correspond to the items the law of Moses required for guilt offerings ([Lv 5:14-6:7](#)). However, fashioning an offering in the shape of the thing from which a people wanted to be delivered is well attested in the ancient world ([Num 21:6-9](#)).

6:6 The Philistines knew Israel's history and what God had done in Egypt ([4:8](#)). They were determined to learn their spiritual lesson quicker than the Egyptians had.

6:7-8 The Philistines put forth this one final test with a cart and two cows to make sure the plagues had come from the Lord's hand. Nonetheless, they were certain they needed to send the ark of the LORD away. Untrained cows would not normally know how to work together to pull a cart on a road, and they would not normally leave their calves behind, so when that's what happened, they knew it was from God.

6:9 Beth-shemesh lay in the Sorek Valley a short distance from Timnah, which was controlled by the Philistines ([Jdg 14:1](#)).

6:12 The text emphasizes how the cows' path left no room for doubt about God's guidance. The Philistine rulers followed the cart to the territory of Beth-shemesh, which probably marked the beginning of Israelite-controlled land.

6:13 Harvesting wheat was typically done around late May. The Festival of Weeks, called *shavu'oth* in Hebrew ([Num 28:26-31](#); [Dt 16:16](#)), marked this time of ingathering and included Pentecost ([Lv 23:15-16](#); [Ac 2:1](#)).

6:14 The text does not suggest that the people sinned in offering the cows as a burnt offering, though such offerings normally required a male without blemish ([Lv 1](#)).

6:15 Beth-shemesh was a city appointed for the Levites ([Jos 21:16](#)).

6:16 The five Philistine rulers recognized God's hand in their troubles of the past seven months. They returned to Ekron, where presumably they reported what had happened.

6:17-18 On the Philistine cities, see note at [5:1](#). The expression to this day refers to the time 1 Samuel was written, probably early in the days of the divided kingdom.

1. Jeremy Royal Howard, ed., *HCSB Study Bible*, (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2010), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, Under: "1 Samuel 6 & 7".

6:19 The Hebrew words translated out of 50,000 men do not occur in many early manuscripts, and Beth-shemesh could not have supported such a large population. The reading 70 men, on the other hand, is undisputed. The phrase looked inside the ark may also be translated "looked at the ark" in the sense of unholy staring or gazing. The Levites should have covered the ark as soon as possible and treated it more reverently.

6:20 The men of Beth-shemesh realized their own unholiness in the presence of the holy LORD God. The Philistines had sent the ark away; the citizens of Beth-shemesh now determined to do the same.

6:21 Kiriath-jearim was a city in Judah's territory about 15 miles to the east. Sending the ark there instead of to Shiloh suggests the Philistines may have overrun Shiloh after they captured the ark. Archaeological evidence indicates the city was destroyed about this time.

7:1 Eleazar was a common priestly name ([Ex 6:23](#); [1Ch 9:20](#); [23:21](#); [Ezr 8:33](#)), and the verb consecrated also may hint at the family's Levitical connection.

7:2 The verb translated seek contains the connotation of mourning. Genuine heartfelt repentance seems to have arrived at last.

7:3 Samuel instructed the people to demonstrate the genuineness of their repentant words (the Hb word translated returning carries the idea of repentance) with action. Foreign gods certainly included Baal, chief of the Canaanite gods and a constant object of worship during Israel's days of compromise ([Jdg 2:11](#); [3:7](#)). Ashtoreths were representations of Baal's consort.

7:4 Removal of the Baals and the Ashtoreths must have required some time—though certainly not 20 years, the period of spiritual dormancy following the ark's return ([v. 2](#)).

7:5 Samuel took an active role in confirming Israel's rededication to God. Mizpah was located seven miles north of Jerusalem; during the judges period, the tribes had gathered there for intertribal war against Benjamin ([Jdg 20:1](#)). Some interpreters have identified the site with modern Nebi Samwil, approximately five miles northwest of Jerusalem. The site afforded Israel the opportunity to renew the covenant and to prepare for war with the Philistines.

7:6 The phrase drew water and poured it out is probably a symbolic allusion to the people's hearts being poured out like water before the Lord ([2Sam 14:14](#); [Lam 2:19](#)). The phrase Samuel judged the Israelites at Mizpah shows that he was acting more prominently than he had before.

7:7 The Philistines heard of Israel's gathering and appear to have understood it as preparation for war, because their rulers marched up toward Israel.

7:8 The Israelites' impassioned request to Samuel reveals the level of trust they had in his spiritual leadership.

7:9 Samuel cried out to the LORD, who answered his prayer by bringing Israel deliverance.

7:10 The phrase as the Philistines drew near suggests urgency; Samuel raced to offer the sacrifice as the enemy approached, knowing that God's favor was essential for victory. The LORD...threw them into... confusion as He had done with His enemies in other battles ([Ex 14:24](#); [Jos 10:10](#)). That they fled (lit "were struck down") before Israel highlights the Philistines' defeat.

7:11 The exact site of Beth-car is unknown; the Israelites probably chased the Philistines back down the ridge route toward Philistine territory ([v. 7](#)).

7:12 The location of Shen (lit "the tooth," perhaps referring to some sharp crag or cliff) is unknown. Ebenezer (Hb "stone of help") marks the extent of the Israelite victory and is a different place from the site of Israel's earlier encampment ([4:1](#)).

7:14 Such cities as Ekron and Gath were open to attack because they lay along Israelite-Philistine border territory. Amorites probably denotes Canaanite remnant populations in the land.

7:15 Samuel judged Israel throughout his life, though his ministry seemed to decline somewhat (at his own initiative) following the appointment of Saul as Israel's king (chap. 12).

7:16 The cities of Bethel, Gilgal, and Mizpah lay in the territory of Benjamin. Bethel's location is identified with modern Ramallah north of Jerusalem. Gilgal sat in the Jordan Valley near Jericho and was Israel's base camp during the days of Joshua's conquest ([Jos 4:19](#)). On Mizpah, see note at [1Sam 7:5](#).

7:17 The name Ramah is preserved in the name el-Aram, an Arab village located on the site of ancient Ramah five miles north of Jerusalem. Samuel's establishment of an altar to the LORD further suggests Shiloh had been destroyed. [Deuteronomy 12:13-14](#) had warned against building local altars.

English Standard Version - *Study Bible*²

1 Samuel 6-7

6:1-7:1 **Return of the Ark.** The Philistines test whether their troubles come from Israel's God, which leads to the ark's return to the territory of Israel.

6:2 The **Philistines** reluctantly admit defeat and consult with their **priests** and **diviners** on how to **send** the ark back.

6:3 While a **guilt offering** as described in [Lev. 5:14-17](#) did not exist for the Philistines, the ancient Near East shared the concept of misappropriating holy things or places for profane use. Thus the Philistines viewed their current plight as God's "heavy hand" ([1 Sam. 5:11](#)) upon them for their desecration of the sacred ark; this desecration required a sacrifice as some kind of recompense to the God of the ark.

6:4 **Five golden tumors and five golden mice.** The exact relationship between the tumors and the mice is difficult to determine, but from the list in [vv. 17-18](#) one possibility is that only five golden objects are involved and that the "and" should be taken here as "namely," as is not uncommon in Hebrew, yielding "five golden tumors, namely, five golden mice" (see also [v. 11](#)). While that reading is grammatically possible, most interpreters understand 10 items set forth here: five golden tumors as well as five golden mice.

6:5 Even the pagan Philistines must eventually **give glory to the God of Israel**.

2. Lane T. Dennis, ed., *ESV Study Bible, The: English Standard Version*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Bibles, 2008), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, Under: "1 Samuel 6 & 7".

6:6 as the Egyptians. The Philistine religious professionals knew all about the events of the exodus (see esp. [Ex. 10:1-2](#)).

6:7-9 This is an experiment to discover whether the cause of the Philistines' troubles was a natural event (**coincidence**, [v. 9](#)) or a supernatural one (**it is he who has done us this great harm**, [v. 9](#)). Untrained **milk cows** could not pull a **cart** together well, and if they went anywhere, it would be **home** to their **calves**. Therefore, if they pulled the cart uphill toward Israel, it must be the work of the Lord ([v. 9](#)).

6:11 The golden mice and the images of their tumors refers either to 10 items or to five (see note on [v. 4](#)). If the latter, then the images would be "mouse-shaped" gold items made to symbolize their tumors.

6:12 Beth-shemesh was partway up the Sorek Valley, a valley connecting Israel and Philistia, the scene of many of Samson's exploits. Zorah, Eshtaol, Timnah, and Delilah's home were all in that valley ([Judg. 13:25](#); [14:1](#); [16:4](#)). Ekron was near the place where the valley opens up into the plain.

6:15 Beth-shemesh is listed among the Levitical cities in [Josh. 21:16](#).

6:17-18 This is a formal list with a heading, details (lit., "for Ashdod one; for Gaza one; for Ashkelon one; for Gath one; for Ekron one"), and summary. Many similar lists have been discovered all over the ancient Near East. In these, the summary always encapsulates the details. This structure suggests that the gold tumors in the heading and details may be the same as the gold mice in the summary ([v. 18](#); see also the lists in [30:26-31](#) and [2 Sam. 23:8-39](#); but see notes on [1 Sam. 6:4](#); [6:11](#)). The summary is: "**and [or, namely] the golden mice, according to the number of all the cities of the Philistines belonging to the five lords,**" i.e., both walled forts and their surrounding unwalled villages. This phraseology was probably chosen to ensure that no part of the Philistine territory was left out. The five cities named in [v. 17](#) would include "all the cities of the Philistines belonging to the five lords," since each of the five Philistine cities would have unwalled villages associated with it. (Note "Ashdod and its territory" in [5:6](#); a similar phrase refers to a political unit in Assyrian annals. In [27:5-6](#), Ziklag is a "country town" belonging to the "royal city" of Gath.) This list may have been put into the box with the gold items.

6:19 The Hebrew expression **looked upon** indicates staring, and perhaps gloating; this irreverence explains why God **struck some of the men**. The puzzling Hebrew text "seventy men, fifty thousand men" (ESV footnote) may possibly mean "seventy men, i.e., five people out of every thousand" (or "every clan"). If this is the correct meaning, then the population of the city would have been 14,000 people (or 14 clans).

6:20 The people of **Beth-shemesh** sound like the people of Ashdod ([5:7-8](#)).

6:21 Kiriath-jearim was about 10 miles (16 km) farther up the Sorek Valley toward Jerusalem. It was a strategic location, situated on a hill at the juncture of the boundaries of Judah, Dan, and Benjamin.

7:1 Eleazar is also the name of Aaron's son (e.g., [Ex. 6:23](#), [25](#); [Num. 3:2](#)); the name Eleazar was probably common in the Levitical families. In fact, it may be that Eleazar was descended from Aaron and that was why the people of Beth-shemesh asked Kiriath-jearim to take the ark.

7:2-17 Judgeship of Samuel. Nothing has been heard of Samuel for 20 years (since [4:1](#)), but then he calls the people to repent and put aside idolatry, and the people respond. Samuel is not a military figure, but through his prayer and worship the Lord works, and Israel is at peace with its neighbors. He is clearly the leader of "all... Israel" ([8:4](#)). Samuel is also a judge in the more modern sense of the word.

7:3-4 Returning here is the act of repentance, i.e., a change of direction back to the Lord. Samuel gives three commands: (1) turn away from idolatry; (2) direct the **heart to the LORD**; and (3) **serve him** alone (see [Deut. 6:4-15](#); [Josh. 24:14-28](#); [Judg. 10:6-16](#)). **Foreign gods and the Ashtaroth** refers to the totality of idols. **The Baals and the Ashtaroth** has the same meaning.

7:5-6 Mizpah is probably the modern Tel en-Natsbeh, about 7 miles (11 km) north of Jerusalem, near an important north-south road. It was a place of assembly for all Israel, as in [Judges 20-21](#) and [1 Sam. 10:17-27](#), where Saul was proclaimed king. It was on Samuel's circuit for judging ([7:16](#)). **I will pray to the LORD for you**. Samuel was known as an intercessor ([v. 8](#); [12:23](#); [Jer. 15:1](#)). They **drew water and poured it out before the LORD and fasted**. Like fasting, pouring out the water was an act of self-denial as part of Israel's confession. **We have sinned against the LORD**. The people's action was also an act of offering with similarities to the whole burnt offering in [1 Sam. 7:9](#)—it was given completely to the Lord.

7:9 nursing lamb. An animal could be sacrificed once it was eight days old ([Ex. 22:30](#); [Lev. 22:27](#)). A basic purpose of the **whole burnt offering** was to make atonement ([Lev. 1:4](#)).

7:10 The term for **confusion** (Hb. *hamam*) occurs first in [Ex. 14:24](#), where the Lord threw the Egyptian army into "panic" (see also [Ex. 23:27](#); [Josh. 10:10](#)). See especially [2 Sam. 22:15](#) (cf. [Ps. 18:14](#)), where the Lord's lightning routs (same Hb. word, *hamam*) the enemy.

7:13 did not again enter the territory of Israel. The victory is here described as a decisive turning point, although Philistine garrisons appear in [10:5](#); [13:3](#). Perhaps this refers only to a temporary condition, such as during **all the days of Samuel**.

7:14 from Ekron to Gath. Ekron and Gath were the easternmost cities of the Philistine pentapolis (see note on [5:1](#)). This verse probably means that the cities and territories that had come under the control of those two ruling cities were freed from their control. The **Amorites**, broadly speaking, were the pre-Israelite Canaanites (see [2 Sam. 21:2](#)). Thus Israel was not bothered by enemies from inside or from outside.

7:15 Samuel judged (see [v. 6](#)) **Israel all the days of his life**. This is a summary of Samuel's activities as judge; from his hometown of Ramah, he visited the cities of Bethel, Gilgal, and Mizpah, which are all in or around the district of the Benjaminite clans.

7:16 Bethel was one of the most important sacred sites, being associated with the patriarchs (see [Gen. 35:15](#)). The ark was there at one time ([Judg. 20:26-27](#)). [Joshua 18:21-22](#) lists it as a Benjaminite city, but during most of history it was a part of Ephraim. It was in Bethel, as well as in Dan, that Jeroboam established a sanctuary for worshipping a golden calf as a rival to Jerusalem ([1 Kings 12:28-29](#)). The modern site is Beitin, 10 miles (16 km) north of Jerusalem, at the intersection of two major highways—the mountain ridge road and the main road leading from Jericho to the coastal plain. The site of **Gilgal** has not yet been identified. It was the place on "the east border of Jericho" where Joshua and the Israelites camped after crossing the Jordan River ([Josh. 4:19](#), etc.). This ancient city was a place of worship and sacrifice in the Benjaminite district. Gilgal was important in the kingship of Saul: he was ordered to go there and wait on God after his private anointing ([1 Sam. 10:1](#)); there the people made him king ([11:15](#)); and there his perpetual (i.e., dynastic) kingship was rejected ([13:8-15](#)) and finally negated ([15:23](#)). Later, in the eighth century, Amos ([Amos 4:4](#); [5:5](#)) and Hosea ([Hos. 4:15](#); [9:15](#); [12:11](#)) denounced Gilgal, along with Bethel, as an active but illegitimate place of worship. Thus, the narrator summarizes Samuel's era: Israel was secure and stable both externally and internally under the judgeship of Samuel, for the hand of the Lord was against the Philistines and there was peace between the Israelites and the Amorites. Samuel's annual visits from his hometown of Ramah gave the people confidence and trust in God and in Samuel's leadership. In the next episode, however, the people of Israel senselessly request a new institution (kingship) rather than a new judge, despite Samuel's opposition.

NLT Life Application Study Bible³

1 Samuel 6-7

6:3 What was this guilt offering supposed to accomplish? This was a normal reaction to trouble in the Canaanite religion. The Philistines thought their problems were the result of their gods being angry. They recognized their guilt in taking the Ark and now were trying everything they could to placate Israel's God. The diviners (**6:2**) probably helped choose the gift they thought would placate Yahweh. But the offering consisted of images of tumors and rats, not the kind of guilt offering prescribed in God's laws (**Leviticus 5:14-6:7; 7:1-10**). How easy it is to design our own methods of acknowledging God rather than serving him in the way he requires.

6:7-12 The Philistine priests and diviners devised a test to see if God was really the one who had caused all their recent troubles. Two cows who had just given birth were hitched to a cart and sent toward Israel's border carrying the Ark of the Covenant. For a cow to leave her nursing calf, she would have to go against all her motherly instincts. Only God, who has power over the natural order, could cause this to happen. God sent the cows to Israel, not to pass the Philistines' test, but to show them his mighty power.

6:9 The Philistines acknowledged the existence of the Hebrew God, but only as one of many deities whose favor they sought. Thinking of God in this way made it easy for them to ignore his demand that people worship him alone. Many people "worship" God this way. They see God as just one ingredient in a successful life. But God is far more than an ingredient—he is the source of life itself. Are you a "Philistine," seeing God's favor as only an ingredient of the good life?

6:19 Why were people killed for looking into the Ark? The Israelites had made an idol of the Ark. They had tried to harness God's power, to use it for their own purposes (victory in battle). But the Lord of the universe cannot be controlled by humans. To protect the Israelites from his power, he had warned them not even to look at the sacred sanctuary objects in the Most Holy Place or they would die (**Numbers 4:20**). Only Levites were allowed to move the Ark. Because of their disobedience, God carried out his promised judgment.

God could not allow the people to think they could use his power for their own ends. He could not permit them to disregard his warnings and come into his presence lightly. He did not want the cycle of disrespect, disobedience, and defeat to start all over again. God did not kill the men of Beth-shemesh to be cruel. He killed them because overlooking their presumptuous sin would encourage the whole nation of Israel to ignore God.

7:1 The Ark was taken to Kiriath-jearim, a city near the battlefield, for safekeeping, and Eleazar was given the task of caring for it. Why wasn't it taken back to the Tabernacle at Shiloh? Shiloh had probably been defeated and destroyed by the Philistines in an earlier battle (**4:1-18; Jeremiah 26:2-6**) because of the evil deeds of its priests (**2:12-17**). Apparently, the Tabernacle and its furniture were saved because we read that the Tabernacle was set up in Nob during Saul's reign (**21:1-6**) and in Gibeon during the reigns of David and Solomon (**1 Chronicles 16:39; 21:29, 30; 2 Chronicles 1**). Shiloh, however, is never again mentioned in the historical books of the Old Testament. Samuel's new home became Ramah (**7:15-17; 8:4**), his birthplace (further evidence of Shiloh's destruction).

3. *Life Application Study Bible*, (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1988), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 417 - 420.

7:2, 3 Israel mourned, and sorrow gripped the nation for 20 years. The Ark was put away like an unwanted box in an attic, and it seemed as if the Lord had abandoned his people. Samuel, now a grown man, roused them to action by saying that if they were truly sorry, they should do something about it. How easy it is for us to complain about our problems, even to God, while we refuse to act, change, and do what he requires. We don't even take the advice he has already given us. Do you ever feel as if God has abandoned you? Check to see if there is anything he has already told you to do. You may not receive new guidance from God until you have acted on his previous directions.

7:3 Samuel urged the Israelites to get rid of their foreign gods. Idols today are much more subtle than gods of wood and stone, but they are just as dangerous. Whatever holds first place in our lives or controls us is our god. Money, success, material goods, pride, or anything else can be an idol if it takes the place of God in our lives. The Lord alone is worthy of our service and worship, and we must let nothing rival him. If we have "foreign gods," we need to ask God to help us dethrone them, making the true God our first priority.

7:4 Baal was believed to be the son of El, chief deity of the Canaanites. Baal was regarded as the god of thunder and rain; thus he controlled vegetation and agriculture. Ashtoreth was a goddess of love and war (she was called Ishtar in Babylon and Astarte or Aphrodite in Greece). She represented fertility. The Canaanites believed that by the sexual union of Baal and Ashtoreth, the earth would be magically rejuvenated and made fertile.

7:5 Mizpah held special significance for the Israelite nation. It was there that the Israelites had gathered to mobilize against the tribe of Benjamin ([Judges 20:1](#)); Samuel was appointed to be leader ([1 Samuel 7:6](#)); and Saul, Israel's first king, would be identified and presented to the people ([10:17ff](#)).

7:6 Pouring water on the ground "before the LORD" was a sign of repenting from sin, turning from idols, and determining to obey God alone.

7:6 Samuel became the last in the long line of Israel's judges (leaders). For a list of these judges, see the chart in [Judges 1, p. 355](#). A judge was both a political and a religious leader. God was Israel's true leader, while the judge was to be God's spokesperson to the people and administrator of justice throughout the land. While some of Israel's judges relied more on their own judgment than on God's, Samuel's obedience and dedication to God made him one of the greatest judges in Israel's history. (For more on Samuel as a judge, see the note on [4:18](#).)

7:12 The Israelites had great difficulty with the Philistines, but God rescued them. In response, the people set up a large stone as a memorial of God's great help and deliverance. During tough times, we may need to remember the crucial turning points in our past to help us through the present. Memorials can help us remember God's past victories and gain confidence and strength for the present.

7:14 In Joshua's time, the Amorites were a powerful tribe scattered throughout the hill country on both sides of the Jordan with a heavy concentration occupying the east side of the Jordan River opposite the Dead Sea. In the context of this verse, however, *Amorites* is another general name for all the inhabitants of Canaan who were not Israelites.

Samuel

We often wonder about the childhoods of great people. We have little information about the early years of most of the people mentioned in the Bible. One delightful exception is Samuel; he came as a result of God's answer to Hannah's fervent prayer for a child. (In fact, the name *Samuel* comes from the Hebrew expression "heard of God.") God shaped Samuel from the start. Like Moses, Samuel was called to fill many different roles: judge, priest, prophet, counselor, and God's man at a turning point in the history of Israel. God worked through Samuel because Samuel was willing to be one thing: God's servant.

Samuel showed that those whom God finds faithful in small things will be trusted with greater things. He grew up assisting the high priest (Eli) in the Tabernacle until God directed him to other responsibilities. God was able to use Samuel because he was genuinely dedicated to God.

Samuel moved ahead because he was listening to God's directions. Too often we ask God to control our lives without making us give up the goals for which we strive. We ask God to help us get where *we* want to go. The first step in correcting this tendency is to turn over both the control and destination of our lives to him. The second step is to do what we *already know* God requires of us. The third step is to listen for further direction from his Word—God's map for life.

Strengths and accomplishments

- Used by God to assist Israel's transition from a loosely governed tribal people to a monarchy
- Anointed the first two kings of Israel
- Was the last and most effective of Israel's judges
- Is listed in the Hall of Faith in [Hebrews 11](#)

Weakness and mistake

- Was unable to lead his sons into a close relationship with God

Lessons from his life

- The significance of what people accomplish is directly related to their relationship with God
- The kind of person we are is more important than anything we might do

Vital statistics

- Where: Ephraim
- Occupations: Judge, prophet, priest
- Relatives: Mother: Hannah. Father: Elkanah. Sons: Joel and Abijah.
- Contemporaries: Eli, Saul, David

Key verses

"As Samuel grew up, the LORD was with him, and everything Samuel said proved to be reliable. And all Israel, from Dan in the north to Beersheba in the south, knew that Samuel was confirmed as a prophet of the LORD" ([1 Samuel 3:19, 20](#)).

His story is told in [1 Samuel 1-28](#). He is also mentioned in [Psalm 99:6](#); [Jeremiah 15:1](#); [Acts 3:24](#); [13:20](#); [Hebrews 11:32](#).

Life Essentials Study Bible⁴

A Principle to Live: **Lukewarm Christianity**

from 1 Samuel 7:2-6

**To experience God’s presence and power,
we must serve Him wholeheartedly.**

Even though God forced the Philistines to return the ark, many in Israel still continued to worship false gods. Consequently, the Lord turned a deaf ear to their physical and emotional pain for 20 years. However, following the same cycle we saw again and again throughout the book of Judges, the children of Israel eventually “began to seek the LORD” ([v. 2](#)), and the Lord in His mercy raised up a deliverer—in this case, Samuel.

Samuel’s challenging message was very similar to Joshua’s (see [Jos 24:14-15](#)). And centuries later, Jesus Christ delivered a very similar message to the church in Laodicea. His words unfortunately apply to many churches today:

I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish that you were cold or hot. So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I am going to vomit you out of My mouth. . . . As many as I love, I rebuke and discipline. So be committed and repent. ([Rv 3:15-16,19](#))

Reflection and Response

What can each of us do personally to help our local churches remove all forms of idolatry and become consistent dynamic communities of love that reflect the life and character of Jesus Christ?

4. Gene Getz, *Life Essentials Study Bible*, (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2011), *WORDsearch CROSS e-book*, 355-356.

A Principle to Live By: **The Power of Prayer**

from 1 Samuel 7:7-14

**To be able to serve God wholeheartedly and be victorious over Satan,
we must seek His help through prayer.**

When the children of Israel gathered at Mizpah to seek the Lord, two dramatic changes are evident. The first involved Samuel. When his “words came to all Israel” to go up and fight with the Philistines, he was probably a young teenager ([4:1](#)). His order led to a catastrophic defeat! Samuel had 20 years to reflect on that terrible event. Now he was much more aware of the way Israel’s idolatry and immorality offended God.

The second dramatic change involved the children of Israel themselves. They realized they could not defeat their enemies in their own strength, so they pleaded with Samuel to keep praying for them. Mercifully—but not surprisingly—the Lord responded to Samuel’s intercession and granted Israel a great victory. They were now doing things God’s way!

The Old Testament is filled with literal flesh and blood battles. However, Paul noted that “our battle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the world powers of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavens” ([Eph 6:12](#)). To win these battles, in addition to protecting ourselves by putting on “the full armor of God” ([Eph 6:13-17](#)), we need to seek God’s help consistently through prayer. Thus Paul wrote,

Pray at all times in the Spirit with every prayer and request, and stay alert in this with all perseverance and intercession for all the saints. ([Eph 6:18](#))

Reflection and Response

Why is it so easy to neglect seeking God’s help through prayer?