

Commentary on 1st Samuel Chapters 5 and 6, by Chuck Smith 7.21.21

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July memory verse, Exodus 14:14 (NKJV)

¹⁴ The LORD will fight for you, and you shall hold your peace."

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Chapter 5

Now the Philistines took this ark of the covenant, and they brought it to one of their cities on the coast the city of Ashdod. And they put the ark of the covenant in their temple of their god Dagon, next to the idol of Dagon. And in the morning, when they came in to worship their god Dagon, they found that the idol was fallen on its face on the floor. So they set him up on the pedestal again. And the next morning when they came in, their god Dagon was lying on the floor but both of his hands had been snapped off, and his neck, his head is rolled out and away from him. So they, and then all of the many men in Ashdod began to break out with boils all over them. [So they began to relate these things to the Ark of the Covenant being with them.] And so they carried the ark of the covenant to another Philistine city, the city of Gath. They said, Here you fellows keep this thing. And then the men of Gath began to break out in boils all over them and so they gathered together with the lords of the Philistines and said, What shall we do with this thing? And they said, Well let's take it to Ekron. And the men of Ekron said, Oh no, you're not bringing that thing here. We don't want it ([1Sa 5:1-11](#)).

So here they were plagued with this thing, they didn't know exactly what to do with it.

Chapter 6

So they called some of their diviners and seers and all, and they said, "What shall we do with this thing? So they said, Well the thing is, send it back to the people of Israel. But don't send it back without an offering. So make some golden things like boils, because of the boils that broke out, and make little mice, golden mice also and put it with the ark of the covenant. And take two cows, and take a new cart, and put it on the cart. And let these two cows take the young away from them. And let these two cows go, and let them take it back to the children of Israel. Now if the cows make a direct line for the camp of Israel, then you know that it was the Lord in all this thing. But if the cows just don't seem to know where to go, and start to wander in the fields, or turn back for their calves, then you'll know that it was just an accident, [some kind of a weird coincidence that it happened]. And so they made this cart, and they got these two cows, and they took them from their calves, and harnessed them to this cart with the little golden emerods, or boils, and the little golden mice as an offering unto the Lord. And they set them loose and the cows made a direct line for the camp of Israel, just sort of mooing all the way. And so the lords of the Philistines followed to see the thing [and of course] as the ark came and approached the camp of Israel again the people shouted for joy there around Bethshemesh, where the ark was returning... So when the lords of the Philistines saw it, [they went back and they said, Boy it was, they went right there. And they recognized that it was the hand of the Lord that was against them.] Now the men of Bethshemesh were curious and they began to look into the ark ([1Sa 6:1-19](#)).

Now this is something that was strictly forbidden under the law of God to look into the ark of God. Only the priests were allowed to see the ark of God, and before they would remove it out of the Holy of Holies they would cover it with these blankets. But these men, out of curiosity began to peer at it, and actually seventy of them died who curiously were looking at the ark of God. Now there is a statement here which is a difficult translation in verse nineteen.

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 ([1Sa 6:19](#)):

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Actually it should read, "Of the city, or of the people of fifty thousand, seventy were slain, seventy men were slain." In other words, of that population of the area, approximately fifty thousand people, seventy of them were slain.

and the people lamented, because the Lord had smitten the people with this great slaughter. 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 ([1Sa 6:19-20](#))?

In other words, "We gotta get rid of this thing, who of us can stand before the holiness of God?" Interesting question and one that we should be interested in. We should recognize first of all the holiness of God. That absolute holiness of God is actually deadly for sinful man to approach. We, none of us dare try to stand before a holy God in our own righteousness. We remember on the mount when God gave the law, He said, "Now put a fence around. Don't let anybody approach lest they be slain by the presence of God."

Access to God in the Old Testament was not a simple thing. The high priest could only approach once a year, and that after many sacrifices. When he approached God he had bells on the borders of his garments, a rope tied around his ankle. As he was in the Holy of Holies, they would stand without listening for the bells. If the bells would stop ringing they knew that there was some flaw in the priest or in the offering, and they'd been smitten dead before the holiness of God. They'd pull him out with a rope. They wouldn't dare go in to fetch him. The holiness of God was something that they highly respected in those days. Tragically we don't really respect the holiness of God that much today.

In the early church when there was such great purity, when Ananias and Sapphira decided that they were going to pull off their little scam and pretend that they were giving everything to God, when in reality they were holding back from God, because of the purity of the early church, there was such purity that this sin could not abide. When Ananias laid it down, Peter says, "That's what you sold it for?"

He said, "Yep."

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He said, "Why have you decided to lie against God?" And, Ananias fell over dead. The holiness of God. He dared to come into the purity of the assembly with this scam. His wife being a party to the whole thing, not knowing what happened to her husband, came in a little later, put down her half, and he said, "Did you sell the property for that much?"

"Yep."

He said, "Look, you and your husband have agreed together to lie against the Holy Spirit. You've not lied to man; you've lied to God. Behold, the feet of those who carried your husband out, are gonna carry you out." She fell over dead.

Now some people say, "Oh God, return purity to your church." Well you better be careful how you pray. You might not last if God will return such purity to the church. That holiness of God, something that they highly respected, especially when they saw these guys dropping over dead who dared to presume to look at the ark of God, and so they said, "Who amongst us can dwell amongst this holy God? Who of us can stand amongst this holy God?" You know, "Where are we gonna send this thing? Let's get rid of it."