

Who Can Stand Before Him? (1 Samuel 6:13-7:2)

1. The Delightful Donation at Beth-shemesh (v.13)

- After the ark of the LORD was in Philistine country for seven months, they sent it back, along with their own guilt offerings, in a box set next to the ark.
- The people of Beth-shemesh were harvesting their wheat crops (May-June). They “lifted their eyes and saw the ark” (v.13).
- The ark arrives in this small village unexpectedly. 34,000 soldiers were killed prior to the ark being captured by the Philistines (4:2, 10). While the ark was encamped at Ashdod, Gath, and Ekron, the judgment of God fell on the Philistines through tumors, fear, panic, and death.
- There was no intervention from the Israelites to retrieve the ark; there was no counsel, invasion, or campaign to recapture. Not a single soldier from the nation of Israel had been called to arms to rescue it.
- The joy and elation that the men experienced at Beth-shemesh would have been overwhelming. The cart stopped by a large stone at the field of Joshua (v.14).

2. The Demeanor at Beth-shemesh (v.14-15)

- Gratitude always has a spill-over effect for the recipients of an undeserved gift.
- Their immediate response to the arrival of the ark was burnt offerings. The cart was used as the source of fuel for the fire. The milk cows were slaughtered, and the animal was completely consumed. It was “on that day” (v.15).
- Burnt offerings were the most common in Mosaic Law. They were frequently given along with other offerings: guilt (Lev. 5:7, 10, 17-18), Sin (Lev. 5:7; 6:25; 9:2-3, 7; 12:6-8), free will (Lev. 22:18) and new grain (Lev. 23:15-22).

3. The Disastrous Delusion at Beth-shemesh (v.14-15, 18-19)

The Levites (v.15) were the appropriate people to handle the ark (Numbers 3:31; Deuteronomy 10:8; 31:9, 25; Joshua 3:3; 8:33). According to Numbers 4:20, even the Levite clan, which was charged with responsibility regarding the Holy things, could not look into them. What were some of the problems with this account?

- The ark, when transported, was to be covered at times (Numbers 4:5). It was not.
- Only bulls were to be offered for burnt offerings (Lev.1:3). Cows were.
- The ark was set on a great stone; it has become a tourist attraction.
- There is also indication that they may have kept the golden articles.
- Not even the Kohathites were permitted to go and look at the sacred furniture in the tabernacle; only Aaron and his sons were allowed to (Num. 4:1-20).
- The Hebrew indicates that there were many sacrifices and the burnt offering was offered along with other sacrifices (v.15).

The LORD killed many men at Beth-shemesh because of their irreverence, indifference to the glory of God, and pride (v.15, 19). They “looked into/upon/unto/on” the ark. They “gazed” at it while the ark was on top of the great stone and the LORD killed them.

These men viewed the ark of the LORD as common. The priests are supposed to be the spiritual leaders in Israel. We learn that not much has changed in seven months. God will not be mocked in either the Philistine or Israel camps. God wants holiness from his people, not just sincerity.

4. The Devastation at Beth-shemesh (v.19)

- The men did not act properly in relation to the benefits received.
- The combination of archeological evidence, writings of Jewish historians, and the Hebrew text seems to indicate that there were 70 men who died, despite the scribal errors.
- There was great mourning because of the men who the LORD killed.

5. The Decisive and Deceitful Decision at Beth-shemesh (v.20-7:2)

- Just as the Philistines sent the ark away from the temple at Ashdod to Gath and Ekron, the men at Beth-shemesh are sending the ark away to Kiriath-jearim.
- Kiriath-jearim is about fifteen miles east-northeast of Beth-shemesh in the heartland of Israel. It was also a Gibeonite city (Josh. 9:17). The Gibeonites tricked Joshua into permitting them to be woodcutters and water-bearers for the tabernacle (9:21-22, 27). Kiriath-jearim was also called Kiriath-Baalath, which indicates that at one point it had previously been a high place for the Canaanites and was associated with a place of worship (Joshua 15:60; 18:14).
- Nothing is known of the house of Abinadab (7:1), or his son Eleazar, other than being a Levite, since Eleazar and Uzzah are part of the same family (2 Sam. 6:3).
- Eleazar would have watched over the ark. There is no indication that he carried out any priestly function because nothing is said of them consecrating him as the priest of the ark.
- The first time, the Philistines defeated the Israelites in a great slaughter. This time, the LORD struck them with a great blow (v.19) in their irreverence.
- Israel lamented for 20 years which indicates that Samuel is not only a prophet, but also a preacher. Technically, the ark was in Kiriath-Jearim for a total of 60 years until David retrieved it, and brought it to Jerusalem (2 Sam. 6).

Who can stand before the LORD? (v.20)

- Only those with clean hands and a pure heart (Psalm 24:3-4).
- Since all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23), and our best works considered as filthy rags (Isaiah 64:6), we need a righteousness and standing that we cannot attain in ourselves. This is found in Jesus Christ alone.

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