

## 1 Samuel 6:1-7:2: God's Love for God's People

As we look to 1 Samuel again this morning, I want to amend a statement I made a few weeks ago. And that is that chapters 5 and 6 here are something of a detour from the main story line. As they say in the NFL: Upon further review of the play, that ruling has been overturned. I think there's actually a larger storyline going on. And I think it started all the way back in chapter 4. And the reason I think it's important to mention that is because what I want to show you is that our passage this morning - far from being a random look at Philistines - is central to this whole section.

In the OT especially there is a writing style called chiasm. Chi in greek is the shape of an x. A chiasm in Scripture is something like a literary seesaw. A story or passage builds and builds, then there's a climax, and then the author unwinds the story in just the opposite order. ABC then CBA. It's like a seesaw - up one side, down the other, but with telling stories. Sometimes it's not always obvious.

Chiasms can be big or small. Jonah is an example of a large chiasm. Jonah starts off by going down to Joppa. He then goes down into the boat. Then down into the lower part of the boat. Then he gets tossed down into the sea and then eaten by a fish. Down, down, down, down, down - then Jonah prays to God - then it's up, up, up, up. That's a chiasm. The center of Jonah is Jonah's prayer to God in the belly of the fish.

Jesus uses smaller chiasms in his teachings regularly.

**Matt 6:24:** "No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.

Chiasms do 2 things. First, the center of the chiasm - if there is one - is often the most important part of the section. Not always, but it's often the main thing the biblical author is trying to communicate. In Jonah's case, I think his prayer to the Lord is probably the centerpiece of the book. He disobeys and goes down. He prays then goes up. We should probably pay close attention to his prayer.

The second thing a chiasm does is help us identify where a section begins and ends. And that's where I think this section is larger than what I originally thought.

If you remember in chapters 1-3 of 1 Samuel, the book was all about Samuel - his miraculous birth and his calling. But starting in chapter 4 and ending in 7 we have a crisis regarding the ark. So watch how this goes. In chapter 4 Israel is defeated in battle. Chapter 5 the ark wreaks havoc in the land of the Philistines. Toward the end of chapter 6 the ark is returned and wrecks havoc in Israel. And then in chapter 7 Israel defeats the Philistines in battle.

A: Israel defeated  
B: Ark Plagues the Philistines  
B1: Ark Plagues the Israelites  
A1: Israel is Victorious

So what do we do with that? Two things: First, when we step back and see the larger picture, we realize these four chapters are telling a larger story. It'd be like reading just the Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers all on it's own. A good book, good storyline, but it's part of a larger storyline that would be helpful for us to know. Yeah, it's interesting that the Philistines were afflicted, but why were they afflicted? And why were the Israelites afflicted? Seeing the larger story will help us answer that.

The second thing it tells us is that this section in **6:1-18** is sort of the middle point of this whole section. It's the middle of the seesaw - of the chiasm - it's the most important point. Where the Philistines give a very weird offering to God while returning the Ark that they had captured in battle.

So what is the point of this section, then? Here's what I think the point is: God's love for his people is not based on how intense their worship is of him.

If you are a Christian, if you are a follower of Jesus Christ this morning, God's love for you is not based on how zealous or how cold you are for him at this very moment. His love for you is based his own grace in choosing to love you.

And no matter how intense anyone else's' religion is, it doesn't earn them God's favor. And we're going to sort of back into that conclusion. It's not going to be obvious to us at first but that's where we're going to end up.

Let me start this way: have you ever noticed that sometimes those who follow a false god are more intense in their false religion than we are in following the true God? If you look around at difference religions, there are some folks who are very, very dedicated to their god. Don't get me wrong: what they do is wrong and pagan and not pleasing to God. But sometimes they put us to shame when we compare their devotion to their false god with our devotion to the King of Kings and Lord of lords.

There are 5 basic requirements for Muslims to follow Allah. An initial profession of faith in Allah and Muhhamed. Then they are to pray 5 times a day where they bow on the ground toward Mecca - they drop everything and pray at the regulated time. They also fast 3 times a year, including Ramadan which is a month-long fast that occurs from dawn to dusk. They are to give generously to charity and once in their lifetime make a pilgrimage to Mecca. I mean, when's the last time we made a pilgrimage to somewhere other than Costco?

Mormons begin seminary classes during high school. It's basically an ongoing class they take several times a week covering the OT, NT, BOM, Pearl of Great Price and Doctrines and Covenants. And then they go on a two year long mission. And if you're obedient, give enough, and have a recommend from your bishop you can then go serve in the local temple.

JWs don't celebrate any holidays, are required to attend meetings and do so many hours of door to door evangelism each month.

Now, I'm not saying those things are legitimate acts of worship - those guys don't worship the same God we worship. Their worship does not bring honor and glory to God because they reject the true Jesus.

But I've got to tell you: sometimes I think about what they do and it puts me to shame. How many hours a month do I spend in evangelism? Do I really pause 5 times a day in intentional, prolonged prayer to God? Do we go on mission trips, let alone send people on mission trips?

And I know these guys are doing it for the wrong reasons. They're trying to earn their salvation. They're boasting in their works. They're just going through the motions. I know those things. We can spin it all kinds of ways. But I think it's fair to say there are times when people are more devoted to their false god than we are to the true and living God.

And what can happen as we look at other people as they zealously worship their false gods is we can wonder: are we for real? Or are we just playing games? And sometimes that's a legitimate question. We need to ask it. But here's the reality: God's love for us is not based on how zealous we are or cold we are at any given moment. God's love toward his people is based on his sovereign work in making us his children.

And I think that's the exact situation we see here. We're going to read through this section and there are points where the Philistines seem pretty comical. But in their pagan futility they are actually taking God more serious than Israel was just 2 chapters ago. The Philistines don't have the OT Law, God didn't reveal himself specifically to them like he did to Moses. But God is raining down judgement on them and they know it and they are trying to appease God. They are doing all they can in their darkened, pagan understanding. And really, they were doing more than what Israel was doing.

You'd almost think God would say: forget these pagan Israelites, I'm adopting the Philistines! But he doesn't. Why? Because he has made a covenant with Israel. Take a look at some of the things the Philistines are doing.

**Read 1-5**

1) So a few things to point out here. First, they seriously recognize their affliction could be from God. They make the clear connection between the plagues they've been afflicted with and God. The Ark has come in, defeated Dagon, causing affliction and they don't try to explain it away.

There may have been a minority who tried to pawn it off on something else. **Read 6**

So it seems that there was a case made for why they should send golden tumors and mice to the Israelites. Not everyone was buying in. We see that also in **Vs. 9. Read**

Because we are reading the history of the situation and have the author's commentary on the what happened we know that this was God's heavy hand against this people. But they weren't 100% sure. They were pretty sure, but sending the Ark back was going to be the litmus test for whether or not this was from Yahweh.

They were taking this plague seriously. They were concerned that there was a spiritual component to their suffering.

The Israelites had forgotten this and Christians often forget this too. Our culture is so inundated with medical jargon and prescriptions and doctor's appointments we give almost no thought to the reality that physical/medical afflictions could be from God for a specific reason.

**1 Cor. 11:30:** Paul says people are sick and weak and dying because they profane the Lord's Supper.

**Jas 5:13-15:** Indicates that sin can cause an illness so serious that the person can't get out of bed. They have to call for the elders of the church to come and anoint them with oil as part of their repentance in order that God might perhaps heal them.

You remember when Jesus healed the paralytic at the pool of Bethesda in **John 5:1-17**? Where all those guys sat around waiting for the water to stir and they'd try to race into the pool because whoever got in first supposedly got healed? Jesus healed the man and then warned him: "See you are well; Sin no more that nothing worse may happen to you." That's a threat. If you keep sinning, being paralyzed will be easy."

The people of God have often failed to connect our illnesses and afflictions with the discipline of God.

Now, I want to be very careful here. I am not saying what the false-gospel prosperity preachers on TBN are saying: that if you have perfect faith you will be perfectly healthy. Or if you are perfectly obedient, you will be healthy. I'm not saying that. Sometimes we just have afflictions. Sometimes we get sick or hurt. Sometimes godly people die from terrible diseases that have nothing to do with sin.

**But** what I am saying is what the Bible says over and over: that many afflictions and discomforts are from God as an act of discipline. And that it often takes a lot of self-examination to figure out exactly what the source of that is. I'm not talking about throwing up a prayer or two to God. I'm not talking about causally thinking through if we've sinned in some big way.

I'm talking about a sustained, thorough, prayerful, fasting, examination of our lives. Asking for input from others and humbly considering all possible areas of our lives we might need to submit to God in. Searching the Scriptures to see if we have transgressed in some kind of way and then making it right if we have. That's foreign to us. But it's taken for granted in the Bible.

2) There's another thing the Philistines are doing here that the Israelites weren't: they admitted their guilt before God. **Read 3-4**

One of the things we see in the OT is that there were a variety of different sacrifices people could offer to God. There were sin offerings, guilt offerings, burnt offerings, freewill offerings, peace offerings, so on. It also appears that pagan religions had the same basic categories of offerings to their idols.

In Israel, the guilt offering was usually if someone had specifically sinned against God. **Lev. 5:14-19** talks about sinning against “the holy things.” Sometimes we sin against our neighbor, sometimes we sin specifically against God and his things. We take the holy things of God and profane them.

Can you imagine if I went into the kitchen and got out my wife’s mixing bowls and then used them to change the oil in my truck? That probably wouldn’t go over too well. I’ve taken something sacred and used it for common purpose. If I did that, I’d have to make restitution - and it would probably be more than just buying new bowls.

That’s what the guilt offering was. When God himself or God’s things were violated, restitution was made. And the restitution was an admission of guilt, of wrongdoing. Best we can tell that is the same throughout the ancient world.

What these Philistines are doing is admitting their guilt to God. They are admitting that what they have done with the Ark of God, with the things of God, is wrong. Which is more than we can say for the Israelites at this point. The Israelites, as far as we can tell, haven’t admitting they’ve done anything wrong. In fact, it appears that the Israelites even at this point in the timeline are off worshipping other gods. **Read 7:3-6**

When the Israelites went into battle back in chapter 4, Yahweh was just one of the gods they happened to be worshipping at the time. The Ark was just another trinket to them. And even after it was taken they weren’t repentant. Chapter 7 occurs after the 7 months the Ark was in Philistia, after the Ark had killed a bunch of Israelites, after Samuel came and warned them.

On the contrary the Philistines are proactively seeking to rid themselves of their self-professed guilt. It would appear that the Philistines are more concerned about ridding themselves of guilt than the people of God.

I think if we’re honest, sometimes the people of God - believers - are the worst repenters ever. And that’s whether we’re talking about big name people within Christianity - people with a large following - or whether we’re just talking about ourselves.

How many times in our lives have we been in a situation where we were at odds with someone and in an ultimate sense we were in the right - but we we sinned too? A lot of times what happens in those situations is that we cling so close to our rightness that we ignore the fact that maybe we messed up too.

Here, the Philistines had been given a massive victory by God - the true God. They had defeated the wicked people of Israel. But they were still guilty. And they knew that.

I think the thing we learn from the pagans here is that if we’re guilty of something before the Lord we need to simply own it. Own our guilt, own the crime, own the sin. And then deal with it.

3) There’s another thing we see with the Philistines and that’s that they are generous and thoughtful toward God in making restitution.

Let’s be honest, making golden tumors and golden mice to give to God is a little weird. But one thing is clear: they’re not skimping out on God. They’re not short-changing God with what they’ve done. There is a sense of gravity and sorrowfulness and even thoughtfulness with their offering.

The way in which they were being disciplined corresponded to their restitution.

And I just want to remind us here: these are pagans! They’re putting Israel - the people of God - to shame here with their acts of worship. It’s not true devotion - they just want Yahweh off their back. But it’s pretty insightful nonetheless.

4) We also see them leave room for faith. Here’s what I mean that they leave room for faith: they are not so concerned with controlling every aspect of the situation that they can’t see God work. And they leave room for faith in a kind of an odd way:

They take two cows who have had babies. The cows will want to return to the calves, they're not going to want to go to Israel. And they take those cows and put a yoke on them. And these cows have never drawn a cart. It takes training a team of animals to pull a cart well. And these cows never had that training. So the cows have no desire to leave the area because of the calves and they have no training to go away anyway. And they say, "Look, if the cows head to Israel we know for sure this is God's work."

And that's exactly what happens. The cart heads toward Israel and their suspicion that Yahweh was behind everything was confirmed.

You and I would have probably have hooked the cows up to a trained team of horses and made sure that that cart got back to Israel. We would have dug ruts for the wheels to go in so it couldn't possibly go a different direction. We would have made sure we accomplished it getting back to where it came. And in so doing, we would have missed the obvious hand of God in the process.

See, for all our love for Jesus, we are often very anti-supernatural. We saw that with illnesses a little bit ago. But we live in an age where we have to have contingency plans for our contingency plans. Where if we don't have everything planned out for us, who knows how we'll survive. And if we don't have contingency plans for contingency plans we're being foolish. And don't get me wrong - planning is a good thing. But sometimes we forget that there's a supernatural aspect of God's intervention in life that needs to be not just accounted for, but allowed for.

**Prov. 16:9:** The heart of man plans his way but the Lord establishes his steps.

We do need to plan but planning does not mean that my plan is for sure God's will. What if we plan the way and God says "I'm putting you on another path"? We are saved by faith and we live by faith and we need to allow space for God to work.

God does, of course work here. The cattle make it back to Israel, which is a miraculous work of God's superintending. The people sacrifice the oxen and celebrate it's return. But look at this. **Read 6:19-7:2**

What's up with that? God supernaturally guides the Ark back to Israel and then kills his own people. What happened? Well, we don't know for sure. For one thing, we don't know if the reason people died was because they looked *into* the Ark or because they looked *upon* the Ark with contempt. If you've ever seen Indiana Jones you know the storyline is that to open the Ark unleashes this raw power that kills people.

The Hebrew is a little unclear here but the idea is probably more they looked upon the Ark with contempt. We don't know that that's the case. It may simply have been that people despised the Ark because the last time they saw it it did them no good. Or they since they were still worshipping their other gods they didn't want the Ark back in their territory. Whatever the case, God struck them down.

There's also some question about how many men died. Suffice it to say it was probably just 70 men. Those men didn't look on the Ark with the reverence they should have. That probably the Philistines showed it more reverence than the people of God.

What do we do with all of this? Yes, we can take a look at the Philistines and see how they treated the Lord and his Ark. Yes, maybe there are some things we should feel conviction about when those of other religions are more dedicated to their false god than we are to Jesus.

But you know what the real take-away here is? The Ark is back in Israel. Despite all the religious devotion of the Philistines in contrast to the faithlessness of the Israelites, God has never, ever given up on his people. Despite the massive blow of losing 30,000 people. Despite killing these 70 people for their arrogance. God has still supernaturally brought the Ark back into the Promised Land. And the Israelites didn't lift a finger to do it. In fact, God has done this despite the obvious continued disobedience of his people.

**Turn to Acts 17:22-31.** If you remember this is Paul in Athens. And he's there and he sees all this false worship going on. All these gods everywhere and people devoted to them. And his heart is stirred in him. He's not feeling conviction, he's feeling pity toward these people. **Read 22-23**

They were so religious they had all their bases covered, even the base that made had missed a god. That's where Paul brings them the gospel. **Read 24-31**

How do we view the Philistines, how do we view those like the Athenians who are probably more dedicated to false worship that we are to Jesus? We view them as needing the gospel. We view them as needing the unconditional grace of God that is only found in Jesus Christ.

Maybe their devotion should cause conviction in our lives. But what it should really remind us is that God has not chosen us or loved us because our devotion is greater than theirs or forsaken us because our devotion is less than theirs. He has chosen us, just like he chose the Israelites in the OT, purely out of his grace.

**1 Cor. 1: 26-31:** He chose the weak, the foolish, the low and despised that we might not have anything in ourselves to boast in. But that we would boast in his grace.

Yes he showed common grace to the Philistines just like he showed coming grace to the Athenians and just like he shows common grace to others. But more than anything what we take away is that God is - and always will be - faithful to his people. He was faithful to faithless Israel and he is faithful to us.

The Ark of God was the throne of God - really, the presence of God. God had never forsaken his people. And God never will.

**Pray**