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The Ark Leaving Philistia

First Samuel 6: 1-9

The Ark leaving Philistia DIG: Why did the priests and soothsayers suggest a Guilt Offering? Why did that offering consist of imitation mice and tumors made of gold? Why five of each? What lesson was drawn from the plagues that God sent upon Egypt? Why do you think they built a new cart and unyoked cows to transport the Ark? How were the Philistines to be assured that the God of the Israelites had intentionally brought the plague on them and not by chance?

REFLECT: When was the last time you felt God was angry with you? At such times, do you feel like nothing - not even good behavior or Guilt Offerings - will please Him? What finally turns the tide of His anger? When do you test God? When have you treated God with too much familiarity? How do you maintain proper respect for His holiness? Do you use “signs” to determine if ADONAI is for or against a plan of yours? What signs? How do you know if they are from God?

The Philistines’ instinct in offering costly materials was right, but their estimation of the cost of forgiveness was simply too low!

The Ark of ADONAI was in the country of the Philistines for seven months (6:1). During that time the people of at least three **Philistine** cities were thrown into chaos (**to see link click [Be - The Ark in the Land of the Philistines](#)**). Capturing **their** enemies’ most sacred object was something to be proud of, so at first there was opposition to simply giving up **the Ark**. But now **it** clearly had to be sent away. **The five Philistine lords**, representing five cities, **summoned their own priests and soothsayers** (who knew so much about the history of **Isra’el**) **and asked them, “What are we to do with the Ark of ADONAI? Tell us how to send it back where it belongs” (6:2).** There were so many unnecessary deaths. How I wish that those who live in Gaza today would also see the history of **Isra’el** and avoid so many deaths. However, **they** decided to send **the Ark** back to **Isra’el**, and the way **they** did it was extremely revealing.



After what had happened to **their god Dagon**, to **themselves**, and to **their land**, it had created a fear of making things worse by not observing what **they** believed to be the right protocol. **The priests** answered: **If you do send off the Ark of the God of Isra'el, don't send it back empty, but return it to Him with some sort of Guilt Offering.** This is **the offering** for one who stole something from its rightful owner (see [Leviticus Am](#) - **The Guilt Offering: Evidence of Repentance**). So, **the Philistines** were viewed as being thieves who stole **the Ark of the covenant** from **its** rightful owner, **Isra'el**. The expected result was, **"Then you will be cured from the plague (5:6), and you will learn why He has not stopped oppressing you" (6:3).** **The Philistines'** approach revealed both insight and ignorance with respect to **Ha'Shem's** holy wrath. What insight **they** had come from the schooling **they** had received. **They** realized **they** had offended a holy **God**. Yet, even with that insight, **their** desperate attempts to rid **themselves** of the wrath of **the LORD** ultimately exposed **their** great ignorance of **YHVH** and **His** ways.

Therefore, the Philistine lords asked **the priests and soothsayers**, **"What kind of guilt offering should we send him?"** They replied: **Five models of golden tumors.** The bubonic plague (5:6) produces painful swelling and affects the lymph nodes, which are enlarged and produce visible swelling that can become the size of eggs. So, **the golden models of tumors** were the size of **five** golden eggs. This was based on the pagan custom of appeasing the **gods**. Secondly, **the Philistine priests** recommended that **five golden mice** be sent **because that's how many lords the Philistines had, and you and your leaders all had the same illness (6:4).** Just like **the Egyptians (Exodus 12:35-36), the**

Philistines recognized the power of **the God** of **Isra'el** and gave **gold** to **the Israelites** when **they** left.¹⁴⁹

So make models of your tumors (the actual plague) **and models of your mice** (how it was spread) **that are infesting your land, and show respect to the God of Isra'el. Maybe He will stop oppressing you, your gods and your land (6:5).** They had some superficial knowledge about YHVH, but **they** did not actually know YHVH. That was true of both **the Philistines** and **'Eli** and **his sons**! Both did not believe, only paying lip service to **Him**, but **their** heart really wasn't in it. This is why it is so important to know **the One true God**.¹⁵⁰

How are we to understand this offering? **The priests** realized that any payment to **God** for sin must be costly. **The Philistines** were paying a high price for what they had done to offend **the LORD**, and it was obvious that **they** could only satisfy **God's** wrath by making a costly sacrifice. Moreover, the punishment needed to correspond in some way to the punishment **they** were receiving. Since **God's** judgment involved diseased **mice** and produced **tumors** on **their** flesh, **they** thought to offer **ADONAI** what **6:18** assures us was a great many **golden mice** - each not only for the five major cities, but also for each of **their fortified towns and country villages** - that would memorialize and pay for the dreadful judgment that **God** had inflicted on **them**.

What **the Philistines** *should* have done was to consult an **Israelite priest**! A true **priest** would have told **them** the proper **Guilt Offering**, "**Bring to the LORD as His compensation, a ram from the flock, one without defect**" (Leviticus 5:15b). The prophet **Isaiah** would have gone further and informed **them** that the **ram** looked forward to the coming of **the Savior** whom YHVH would send. **He was pierced for our transgressions; He was crushed for our iniquities; upon Him was the punishment that brought us peace was upon Him and by His wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all (Isaiah 53:5-6).** Finally, in the B'rit Chadashah we learn that this **Savior** is **the Son of God, Yeshua Messiah**, of whom **John** declared: **Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29)!**¹⁵¹

The priests asked their lords, "**Why then do you harden your hearts like the Egyptians and Pharaoh hardened their heart?** Evidently, there was some initial support for opposing the proposed **Guilt Offering**. The opposition of **Pharaoh** to the release of the **Israelite** slaves was evidently well known beyond the borders of **Isra'el**, as was the fact that **he** gained nothing by it but extra plagues on **his people**. **The priests** continued: **When**

the Israelite God had severely dealt with them, didn't the Egyptians let the people go (6:6)? In the end Pharaoh had to give in, so the Philistines would be wise to delay no longer.¹⁵² The five Philistine lords, having suffered the plague of God, needed to immediately release the Ark of the covenant to go back to its place. They prepared themselves by taking **seven steps**.

First, take a new cart. **Second**, and two milk-cows that have never been under a yoke. **Third**, harness the cows to the cart. **Fourth**, put their calves back in the shed. **Fifth**, then take the Ark of ADONAI and lay it on the cart. **Sixth**, put the gold objects in a box next to the Ark you are sending back as a Guilt Offering. And **seventh**, then send it away to go off by itself, but watch to see if it goes up the road to Beth-Shemesh, a Levitical city about fifteen miles west of Jerusalem in the Sorek Valley (Joshua 21:16). If it does, the God of the Israelites is responsible for this great tragedy; if not, we will know that it is not His oppression which has been over us, but that what has been happening to us has been only by chance (6:7-9).

Thus, an experiment was set up to test whether or not ADONAI had been responsible for the plagues, for they might have happened quite **by chance**. Every effort was to be made to do the reverent thing: **the cart** was to be **new** and **the cows unyoked**. Since **the cows** had never pulled a **cart**, and had nursing **calves** dependent on **them**, all **their** instructions would be to turn back. If that happened, it would be "proof" that **the God of the Israelites** wasn't in control and **the Philistines had nothing to fear**. But if, contrary to natural instincts, **the cows** pressed ahead with the precious load, that would show that **He** had been responsible.¹⁵³

The Philistines were practicing an approach to discerning **God's** will that is sometimes used by **God's people**. A famous example is **Gideon**, who responded to the command of ADONAI by seeking a supernatural confirmation (see the commentary on **Judges Ba - The Sign of the Fleece**). Just like **the Philistines**, **Gideon** was asking ADONAI to confirm **His** involvement by making things happen contrary to nature. **Gideon** laid **his fleece on the ground** and asked **the LORD** to make **it wet** with **dew** while **the ground** was **dry**. When that happened, **Gideon** then asked for **the ground** to be **wet** and **the fleece dry**. However, **his** "laying out a **fleece**" is not an example we should follow, but a sign of **Gideon's** weak faith.¹⁵⁴

The planning of **the Philistines** was indeed careful and cunning. **They** set very long odds to prove that **the God of the Israelites** was not superior to **their god Dagan**. The same odds that **the LORD** (and **Elijah**) faced at **Mount Carmel** (see the commentary on **Elijah and**

Elisha Aq - Elijah and the Prophets of Ba'al). Yes, **the Philistines** were frightened, but **they** were determined to show that **ADONAI** was a powerless **god**. **Their** strategy was to prevent **Ha'Shem** from demonstrating **His** sovereignty. Everything was ready. There is dramatic suspense. Waiting to see in **their** scheme would work; waiting to see if **God**, represented by **the Ark**, would leave; waiting to see if **He** could make a move to freedom.¹⁵⁵

The Philistines' instinct in offering costly materials was right, but **their** estimation of the cost of forgiveness was simply too low! Our sin causes infinite offense to **God's** holy justice, and thus we can only be forgiven and cleansed by an infinitely valuable sacrifice. **Peter** says that we gain forgiveness **not with perishable things such as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Messiah (First Peter 1:18-19)**. **God Himself** has sent **the Sacrifice** that fully satisfies **His** every claim of **His** holiness, and by which we can escape **His** wrath against our sins. Only by relying on **the blood of Messiah** can we receive forgiveness, not by something we have earned, but by **grace** alone, through **faith** alone, in **Messiah** alone.¹⁵⁶

*Dear heavenly **Father**, all praise, glory and honor go to you! You could have wiped out **the Philistines** with one word when they captured **Your Ark**, but instead **You** wisely made **Your Name** great by afflicting **them** with tumors. **You** gave definite proof that You are greater than **the Philistine gods**. **You** are so wise in all **You** do. **You** show that **You** are **God** by **Your** creation. When people take time to look at how special and perfect all creation is, it clearly points to you, a mighty and wise **God**. **What can be known about God is plain to them - for God has shown it to them. His invisible attributes - His eternal power and His divine nature - have been clearly seen ever since the creation of the world, being understood through the things that have been made. So people are without excuse (Romans 1:19b-20)**.*

***You** are a **God** of love, and **You** are also to be feared, for you are **Holy, Holy, Holy!** **You** are so far above mankind in **Your** purity and holiness. No one should try to claim **Your** mercy and grace and then think that they can't ignore **You** by living for themselves. **They** need to realize that **God** gives **His** kindness to draw people to **Himself**. **God** asks: **Do you belittle the riches of [My] kindness and tolerance and patience- not realizing that [My] kindness leads you to repentance (Rom 2:5)?** It is utter foolishness to trust in one's own deeds. **You** so graciously sent **Messiah** to die as **the Sacrifice Lamb (Jn 1:29)** for all who would love (**Jn 14:23**) and follow **Messiah** as their **Lord and Savior (Rom 10:9-11)**. It cost **You** so much pain and shame (**Heb 12:2**) to take man's penalty of death for their sin. Thank **You** for **Your** love as our sacrifice. Having **You** as our heavenly **Father** is such a wonderful privilege! **Your** children love to obey and worship **You**, and rejoice to*



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*give **You** praise! In **Messiah Yeshua's** holy **Name** and power of **His** resurrection. Amen!*