

## WEEKLY DEVOTIONAL GUIDE #5

**MONDAY** The priests reminded the people that the Egyptians, in generations past, had refused to recognize the power of the God of the Israelites, and had paid dearly. They instructed exactly how the Ark should be loaded onto a cart – with the guilt offering beside it – and how to hitch up two cows to it. If, they said, the cows would turn away from the barn (and from their calves) and pull the cart towards Israel, then it would be a clear sign that the God of the Israelites had been behind all their recent trouble.

### **I Samuel 6:6-9**

The religious leaders of the Philistines contradicted themselves. They scolded the people for not learning from the events related to the Israelites being in Egypt that their God was mighty, and that He acted on behalf of His people. And then suddenly they suggested that this same sort of thing which was happening to them might be a simple coincidence rather than the hand of their God. That's like confessing the Lord's sovereignty, and then, in the next moment, trying to run my own life myself. (we would never do that, would we?)

**TUESDAY** The Philistines did as their priests recommended. They loaded the Ark and the guilt offering on a cart and hitched up two cows to it. (the cows had calves in the barn) Then they stepped back and watched as the cows turned away from the barn and started pulling the cart in the direction of Beth-shemesh, a town in Israel. The people of this rural community were out working in the fields, reaping the wheat harvest. When they saw the cart and recognized the Ark, they rejoiced greatly. Right on the spot, they chopped up the wooden cart, made a fire, and sacrificed the two cows to the Lord, as an offering. Philistine observers reported back to their own people what they had seen.

### **I Samuel 6:10-16**

Notice the timing: the cart appeared on the very day when the wheat crop was being harvested. If ever there were a good excuse to postpone a Thanksgiving service, this would be it! The citizens of Beth-shemesh knew what their priorities were! They stopped everything they were doing and *offered burnt offerings and sacrificed sacrifices that day to the Lord*. That day means “during the day” or “all day long”. Wow! Let us check our priorities today. What are the most important things (for eternity's sake) that I will invest my time and energy into today?

**WEDNESDAY** The people of that day were not so different from people today: they knew what was wrong and what the Law of Moses clearly forbid, and they did it anyway! They lifted the lid of the Ark (the Mercy Seat) and looked inside. The Lord struck down 70 of those who had looked into the Ark, or who tried to look in it. Maybe the number 70 includes the ones who, in their thoughts, were wishing that they could look in, too. Or maybe there were some who did not try to stop those who lifted the lid to look inside. Anyway, some who did not die sent word to another town that they should come and take the Ark.

### **I Samuel 6:17-21**

This story gives us some idea of how seriously God views obedience. In the middle of a Thanksgiving service with the smoke from the sacrifices still drifting heaven-ward, God punished their disobedience, and did so severely. It also gives

us a sense of how God views corporate responsibility. Cain, after he murdered his brother Abel, and foolishly thought God did not know what he had done, asked God, “Am I my brother's keeper?” He thought the answer was NO. But the answer was, and always is YES. We who are believers have a responsibility to pray for one another. And to build each other up in the faith. And to keep one another from sin. And to encourage and support each other. God views these kinds of responsibilities very seriously. We do well to do the same.

**THURSDAY** The citizens of Kiriath-jearim went to Beth-shemesh to get the Ark. They took it to their own town and stored it in Abinadab's house for 20 years!

### **I Samuel 7:1-2**

Twenty years! While the people *lamented after the Lord*, the Ark (which should have been set up in the Tabernacle for worship) sat in storage in Abinadab's house. Do we sometimes fail to use what God has given us? Maybe a particular talent or gift? Or perhaps an opportunity? We put it aside one day, possibly thinking, “Not now, not today. I'll serve the Lord later.” And twenty years later, it's still there – on the shelf. Today is the day of opportunity! Today, we are His people! Today is the day for serving Him!

**FRIDAY** We read about some things that take place during the twenty years that the Ark stayed in Abinadab's house. The Philistines continued to harass the Israelites. The Israelites continued to worship pagan gods. The prophet Samuel exhorts the people to put aside these idols and false gods, and to serve the Lord wholeheartedly. They meet together and confess their sins to the Lord.

### **I Samuel 7:3-6**

The Israelites were not anti-Jehovah. They were pro-Jehovah. The problem was that they were also pro-gods-of-the-Philistines, and pro-do-whatever-they-wanted, and pro-include-God-with-all-the-other things-in-your-life and maybe that will be good enough. But Samuel calls them to serve God alone. *For me to live is Christ*.

**SATURDAY** The Philistines learned about the Jews gathering and assumed it was for warfare. So they sent their armies to stop it. The people of Israel were petrified and cried out to Samuel. As for his part, Samuel continued to offer sacrifices to the Lord. An Israelite army went out to do battle, but God interceded and sent a great thunder which confused the Philistines, and they were totally routed.

### **I Samuel 7:7-11**

God delivered the Israelites, according to the end of verse 9, as an answer to Samuel's prayer. What was the secret of Samuel's power in prayer? First, it was that he prayed at all. Few people do. Secondly, it was that he prayed for others. Most people pray for themselves. Thirdly, it was that God listened to Samuel because Samuel listened to God. From the time God called Samuel as a boy years before this time and Samuel replied, “Speak, Lord, for Thy servant is listening,” Samuel had been listening to the Lord. You and I know about prayer, but do we pray? Are we listening to Him thru His Word as we should?