

“Holy Cow Moments” (1 Samuel 6:1–7:1)

When I was growing up I often used the phrase, “holy cow!” This is a rather bizarre expression, isn’t it? In the past, young people have used this phrase as an exclamation of surprise. Sadly, it’s possible that it’s a euphemism for “Holy Christ!” (Fortunately, I was not aware of this dreadful possibility when I was growing up.) Regardless of the origin of the phrase, when God displays His power and sovereignty in extraordinary ways you should be left saying (or at least thinking), “holy cow!” It can be as common as noting God’s beauty in creation. Right now the fall colors are breathtaking in their brilliance. Perhaps it’s the birth of your child or grandchild. It’s an incredible experience to see your very own flesh and blood enter this world. What about when God comes through with a financial miracle? You’ve been on the brink of a financial crisis and God meets your need. Of course, the most wonderful expression of God’s sovereignty and power is when He uses you to share the gospel with a person who trusts in Christ.

God loves to provide, “holy cow” moments that display His great power and sovereignty. He wants you and me to be in awe of who He is. He yearns for us to exclaim, “How Great Thou Art!” The problem is, we’re not always expecting God to show up in the midst of our circumstances. Because we’re not looking for God to reveal Himself in our daily lives, we frequently miss Him. It’s not that He isn’t working powerfully, we just miss Him in the busyness of life. There are times, however, when God breaks out in such an irrefutable way that we are forced to grapple with His power and sovereignty. In 1 Sam 6 we will see two such examples.

1. The Lord moves cows to bring His ark home (6:1–12). Our story begins in 6:1 on a historical note: **“Now the ark of the LORD had been in the country of the Philistines seven months.”**¹ This is a dreadful sentence. The ark represented God’s covenant commitment to His people.² However, for the first time in their history, Israel had lost possession of the ark to their enemies.³ In the history of Israel this was a monumental crisis. This event would change the nation forever. (We will discuss more about Israel in the next section. For now, the narrator’s concern is with the Philistines.)

After the Philistines took the ark away from Israel, God judged them with tumors and death (see 5:6–12). Consequently, the Philistines needed to figure out how to “stop the bleeding” (literally). Somehow they must “turn away the hand” that was devastating them.⁴ The stakes were high—one wrong move and more wrath could be poured out. Verses 2–3 state: **“And the Philistines called for the priests and the diviners,⁵ saying,⁶ ‘What shall we do with the ark of the LORD? Tell us how we shall send it to its place.’ They said, ‘If you send away the ark of the God of Israel, do not send it empty; but you shall surely return to Him a guilt offering. Then you will be healed and it will be known to you why His hand is not removed from you.’”**⁷ The Philistines took seven months to figure out that keeping the ark was a bad idea. Finally, they recognized that the plagues that had come upon them were connected with the Israelite ark. They learned a painful lesson in “arkeology.”⁸ Yet, they didn’t know how to get rid of the ark without further jeopardizing themselves. They knew they couldn’t dump the ark up in the hills, so they consulted their priests and diviners to tell them how to send the ark back. Several observations are worth noting: (1) Although the Philistines were Israel’s bitter enemies, they were a deeply religious people. In the ancient world there was no such thing as atheism. All peoples believed in deities and the supernatural influence of the world around them.⁹ What a fascinating fact! Atheism is a relatively recent worldview, and it’s a minority position (less than 2% of the American population). Hence, we must refuse to be intimidated by self-proclaimed atheists. (2) The priests recommended that a guilt offering (cf. Lev 5:15–16; 7:1–6) be sent along with the ark to atone for their sin and to compensate for the violation of the Lord’s honor. Ancient religious protocol mandated that the worshiper not approach his god(s) empty-handed (cf. Exod 23:15; Deut 16:16). This is why the Philistine priests and diviners advised that a guilt offering accompany the ark back to Israel.¹⁰ According to the diviners, this act of compensation would heal the Philistines, and as a consequence, determine why God was afflicting them.

In 6:4–6 we read the Philistines’ thought process: **“Then they said, ‘What shall be the guilt offering which we shall return to Him?’ And they said, ‘Five golden tumors and five golden mice *according to the number of the lords of the Philistines, for one plague*¹¹ was on all of you and on your lords. So you shall make likenesses of your tumors and likenesses of your mice that ravage the land, and you shall give glory to the God of Israel; perhaps He will ease His hand from you, your gods, and your land. Why then do you harden your hearts as the Egyptians and Pharaoh hardened their hearts? When He had severely dealt with them, did they not allow the people to go, and they departed?”**

Despite their efforts, the Philistines missed the Old Testament requirement of the slaying of a ram as part of the guilt offering (Lev 5:15). Instead, the diviners recommended appeasing the Lord with ten gold images, a violation of the prohibition against all likeness of animals and humans (Exod 20:4; Deut 5:8).¹² Incredibly, the recommended statues were to be of ritually detestable animals—mice (Lev 11:29).¹³ As if that were not enough, the Lord was also to be given the gift of five golden images of unclean portions of the human anatomy—“tumors.”¹⁴ On a humorous note, how would you like to make an image of your tumor? Which one would you choose as your model?¹⁵

Regardless of the Philistines’ pagan ignorance, they were at least attempting to think rightly. The “guilt offering” expressed worth (gold), submission (five), and eradication (tumors).¹⁶ They understood that whatever they gave should be something of value, something of sacrifice.¹⁷ Do you have the same conviction in every area of your life? The Philistines were also right to think that God would not simply “forget the past.” They were right to think that a sacrifice was needed before God would be reconciled to them. But they invented their own sacrifice, not knowing that God would provide His own sacrifice. The instinct many people have that a sacrifice for sin is needed is right and true. Yet, God’s sacrifice for sin is Jesus. God’s law required sacrifices with blood in it. Only sacrifices which involved the shedding of blood were adequate to express what Jesus would one day do for sinners needing reconciliation with God. The Philistines were following the instincts of muddled consciences. When the light of the gospel came, what they were looking for would be available in Jesus. He would be the sacrifice for sin that they needed, but couldn’t find.¹⁸ Like the Philistines, are you still searching for a sacrifice for your sins? There is no satisfactory guilt offering apart from Jesus Christ. God is only satisfied with His Son. If you haven’t trusted Jesus as your Savior, will you do so today?

Now back in 1 Sam 6:5 the author draws out a very important principle: God’s hand is all-powerful. The “heavy hand” of God was the reason that the Philistine priests and diviners instructed the Philistine lords to “give glory to the God of Israel; perhaps He will ease His hand “from you, your gods, and your land.”¹⁹ These men understood Yahweh’s great power. Furthermore, the term “glory” (*kabod*) and the verb “to harden one’s heart” (*kbd*), are from the same Hebrew root (*kbd*), creating an interesting word play: It’s better to glorify/honor Israel’s God than to harden one’s heart as the Egyptians did (6:6). Ironically, the Philistine priests and diviners are now urging their people (almost preaching to them!) to give glory and honor to Yahweh, the God of Israel.²⁰ What a fascinating turn of events.²¹ The irony of this is that the glory that Israel refused to ascribe to God by trying to use the ark for their own purposes (4:1–11) would be offered to Him by the pagan Philistines. Indeed, the glory of God will be declared among the nations. This principle serves as a great reminder that God will always ensure His own glory.

Of course, we must remember that the Philistines are a pagan people. So it should come as no surprise then that they devised a test to verify whether it was Yahweh who brought these plagues upon them rather than a coincidence of nature. Amusingly, in 6:7–9 the Philistines attempted to stack the deck against Yahweh: **“Now therefore, take and prepare a new cart and two milch cows on which there has never been a yoke; and hitch the cows to the cart and take their calves home, away from them. Take the ark of the LORD and place it on the cart; and put the articles of gold which you return to Him as a guilt offering in a box by its side. Then send it away that it may go. Watch, if it goes up by the way of its own territory to Beth-shemesh, then He has done us this great evil. But if not, then we will know that it was not His hand that struck us; it happened to us by chance.”**

This section could be called “Mad-cow Test 101.” The Philistines devised a situation in which the probability was so strongly stacked in one direction that only the power of God could bring about a different outcome. Consider these potential “obstacles”: (1) “Milch” cows (6:7, 10) are cows that are still nursing their calves. It would be very unusual for nursing cows to leave their young and head uphill for a town some ten miles away. (2) These cows had not been yoked before so they would be unlikely to cooperate in any way, shape, or form. In this case, however, the cows were to be harnessed to the cart carrying the ark and the gold objects and directed toward Beth-shemesh.²² If, in these unlikely circumstances, the cows pulled the cart straight across the border into Israel, then the Philistines could be sure that their hunch was correct—the God of Israel was behind their troubles. But if the cows did something more natural, then they could safely conclude that it had all been a horrible coincidence.²³

Verses 10–12 provide further intrigue: **“Then the men did so, and took two milch cows and hitched them to the cart, and shut up their calves at home. They put the ark of the LORD on the cart, and the box with the golden mice and the likenesses of their tumors. And the cows took the straight way in the direction of Beth-shemesh; they went along the highway, lowing as they went, and did not turn aside to the right or to the left. And the lords of the Philistines followed them to the border of Beth-shemesh.”**²⁴ The unthinkable occurs—the cows defy nature! The narrator makes two significant comments: (1) The cows “went along the highway, lowing as they went” because their calves were not with them (6:12). (2) The cows were under divine compulsion, not turning “to the right or to the left,” but rather, they stayed on the main road (cf. Deut 2:27). Amazingly, the cows pulled the cart straight to Beth-shemesh (1 Sam 6:11–12a). This brings new meaning to the phrase, “holy cow!” This was a clear miracle—a “holy cow” moment. The Philistines witnessed what occurred (6:12, 16) and learned another lesson in “arkeology.” Yahweh had spoken. He had destroyed their god, their land, and their bodies. He was sending the Philistines the message that He was the one true, sovereign God.

One interesting point worth noting is that in the Bible animals are never disobedient to God’s will. Humans try their best to disobey and defy God’s sovereign will, but animals never do. There are a few lessons here: (1) Animals always obey God, people rarely do. (2) Animals may even be called upon to act contrary to their nature as animals (donkeys speaking, cows leaving calves, hungry ravens leaving perfectly good food for prophets). (3) Animals suffer consequences for the disobedience of humankind (e.g., the sacrificial system). Conversely, humans sometimes receive blessings in spite of their obedience.²⁵ These “lessons” ought to humble us and give us an even greater appreciation for the animal kingdom. It’s almost tempting to pray that we will have the obedience of cows driven by God.

2. The Lord judges His people for their irreverence toward the ark (6:13–7:1). Suddenly our scene shifts and we join the Israelites in the fields of Beth-shemesh: **“Now the people of Beth-shemesh were reaping their wheat harvest in the valley, and they raised their eyes and saw the ark and were glad to see it. The cart came into the field of Joshua²⁶ the Beth-shemite and stood there where there was a large stone; and they split the wood of the cart and offered the cows as a burnt offering to the LORD. The Levites took down the ark of the LORD and the box that was with it, in which were the articles of gold, and put them on the large stone; and the men of Beth-shemesh offered burnt offerings and sacrificed sacrifices that day to the LORD. When the five lords of the Philistines saw it, they returned to Ekron that day. These are the golden tumors which the Philistines returned for a guilt offering to the LORD: one for Ashdod, one for Gaza, one for Ashkelon, one for Gath, one for Ekron; and the golden mice, according to the number of all the cities of the Philistines belonging to the five lords, both of fortified cities and of country villages. The large stone on which they set the ark of the LORD is a witness to this day in the field of Joshua the Beth-shemite”** (6:13–18). The people of Beth-shemesh were “glad” to see the ark. This is likely a gross understatement. They were probably dancing in the wheat fields! The ark had finally returned to Israel! When God’s presence moves among us, we ought to have great excitement. We should strive to be a people who long for His presence to flourish in our lives and in our church.

The people of Beth-shemesh were Levites, and Levites were the appropriate people to handle the ark.²⁷ Unfortunately, nearly every time Levites appear in Judges or Samuel, they are wicked men, or at least incompetent. The Levites of Beth-shemesh didn't break this mold.²⁸ They committed several crucial sins: (1) They offered female cows as a burnt offering (6:13), yet Lev 1:3 requires that all burnt offerings be male. (2) They "took down the ark" (1 Sam 6:15) and set it on a large stone (6:18), when the ark should have been carried and covered. In spite of these failures, these remarkable events were witnessed by the Philistine lords. The people of Beth-shemesh saw it as well. What a powerful testimony! The writer tells his readers that the great stone is still there for anyone to go and see where these great things happened.²⁹

It would be nice if the story ended with 6:18, but it doesn't. The narrator pens gruesome words in 6:19: **"He [God] struck down³⁰ some of the men of Beth-shemesh because they had looked into the ark of the LORD. He struck down of all the people, 50,070 men, and the people mourned because the LORD had struck the people with a great slaughter."**³¹ Before we discuss this verse, I need to address two differing opinions in our English versions: (1) There's disagreement as to whether those who died looked "upon" the ark (ESV and various commentators) or "into" the ark (NASB and most English versions).³² I accept the latter rendering; however, either way the Beth-shemeshites did that which was forbidden, and thus, a number of Israelites were smote that day. (2) There is also some debate as to whether 50,070 people (the Masoretic text and the Greek Septuagint, see also NASB, NET, KJV, NKJV) could have been killed on this occasion, since it seems unlikely that a village such as Beth-shemesh could have over 50,000 men in it. Several popular English versions follow a few Hebrew manuscripts that read only seventy men (ESV, HCSB, NRSV, NIV, NLT).³³ Nonetheless, I am inclined to stay with the plainest rendering of the text (50,070), even if that number seems large. It is, after all, a "great slaughter" (6:19).³⁴ God refuses to be taken lightly by His people.

Now take yourself back in time so that you can feel the weight of this verse. The people of Beth-shemesh were celebrating the return of the ark. Imagine the scene: There on the rock were the ark and the golden objects on display for all to see. The people were rejoicing and laughing. No doubt, "eyewitnesses" were retelling how they looked up and saw the miraculous sight and sound of the noisy cows headed right for them. Many of the men were milling around, and some made their way up to the rock to catch a sight of the famous ark of the covenant. A few curious and courageous souls even tried to lift the lid to check out the ark's contents. Sounds fairly innocent, doesn't it? Obviously, it wasn't! Three times in this verse, the Lord is named as the one who slaughtered His own people.

Why did the Lord respond with such severity? From our limited human perspective, the punishment doesn't fit the crime. But to the ancient audience, there was a certain etiquette expected of people in contact with the holy.³⁵ The problem here is that no Israelite outside of the Aaronic priesthood was ever to be permitted to see even the outside of the ark, let alone the inside (Num 4:5–6, 20). The Levitical Kohathites, who were charged with carrying the ark, were even forbidden to touch or view the ark (Num 4:19–20). They transported the covered ark with poles (Exod 25:13–15; 37:5). The first obligation of the Levites and priests of Beth-shemesh was "to hide the ark from view while avoiding any physical or visual contact with it."³⁶ The Israelites showed less insight than the Philistines. Indeed, even the cows pulling the cart showed more insight than the men of Beth-shemesh.³⁷ Because of their shameless disregard of the sanctity of the ark, the Lord struck them down. Think about it: God afflicted the Philistines for not respecting His holiness as symbolized in the ark (1 Sam 5:1–6). Why should He not do the same to the Israelites who knew better?³⁸ The Israelites knew the law and therefore were more responsible than the Philistines. When you know God's Word and refuse to obey it you're doubly responsible. What portions of Scripture do you know particularly well that you are refusing to obey? Is it the command to abstain from sexual immorality? Perhaps it's God's command to not covet or be greedy? Maybe you're neglecting to spend time with God because you're busy with other pursuits? Or are you forsaking the assembling together with other believers despite the clear teaching of Scripture. How are you guilty of showing disrespect to God? What will you do this week to correct your behavior?

Our story concludes in 6:20–7:1: **“The men of Beth-shemesh said, ‘Who is able to stand before the LORD, this holy God? And to whom shall He go up from us?’³⁹ So they sent messengers to the inhabitants of Kiriath-jearim, saying, ‘The Philistines have brought back the ark of the LORD; come down and take it up to you.’ And the men of Kiriath-jearim came and took the ark of the LORD and brought it into the house of Abinadab on the hill, and consecrated Eleazar his son to keep the ark of the LORD.”** Just like Israel’s elders at Ebenezer (4:3), the people of Beth-shemesh first asked a profound and correct theological question and then followed the question with the wrong solution (6:20). The first question, “Who can stand before the LORD, this holy God?” was appropriate. The implied answer was “no one!” The mourners sensed that the ark symbolized the presence of a “holy God” (6:20; cf. Lev 11:44–45), whose sanctity they could not approach. The response of faith would be to bow in repentance and reverence before a holy God. But in their second question, the Israelites show their true colors: “And to whom shall He go up from us?” They cry out “hot potato!” Like the Philistines (5:8, 10), all the Israelites were concerned about was sending the ark off to the next city.

The reaction of God’s people is incredibly disappointing. Instead of repenting of their sin, they blamed God for their misfortune and sought a means whereby they could quickly be rid of Him. The devastated citizens of Beth-shemesh sent a short, cryptic message to the people of Kiriath-jearim (modern Abu Ghosh), an otherwise obscure village about fifteen miles east of Beth-shemesh, to come down and take the ark up to their place (6:21). The men of Kiriath-jearim accepted the offer and moved the ark to Abinadab’s house. Eleazar, Abinadab’s son, was consecrated to guard or keep the ark of the Lord (7:1). “Eleazar,” whose name means “God is help” or “God is power,” was consecrated (lit. “set apart”) to care for the ark. Eleazar was probably a member of the priestly family since there was no judgment on his ministry before the ark. The ark would remain there until David took it to Jerusalem (2 Sam 6:2).

The question of this passage is: How is it that the God who suffers defeat is able to “arise,” to take initiative, and come home in glory?⁴⁰ The answer is: God is sovereign and free. Think about it: God seemed to be defeated when 34,000 of His people were slaughtered and His ark was taken into the temple of Dagon. But without the aid of the Israelites, God conquered Dagon in his own temple. He then struck the Philistines with tumors and death. In the end, He used cows to supernaturally take His ark back into Israel. God is self-sufficient; He is powerful and sovereign. Thus, we must not assume that, “God has no hands but our hands.” That slogan contains the desperate conclusion that God does not and cannot act in the world in free sovereignty. The truth is that our God is far greater than our modern mindset.⁴¹ The message of this story is: *God’s great power deserves our great awe.*

We can easily fall into a Beth-shemesh mode of thinking. We want our God to be casual and easygoing. He is “the man upstairs” rather than the Lord of Hosts, chummy rather than holy. We want God to be the copilot, and we get worried when He wants to fly the plane. But God wants us to bow before His holiness with respect and reverence. *God’s great power deserves our great awe.* There is a danger in being in the presence of the Lord of Hosts, especially when we come into His presence with arrogance or apathy. Ultimately, there are two ways that you can approach God: (1) You can approach God with a “Holy God” exclamation. “God, you’re awesome! You’re the King of kings and Lord of lords. There’s no one like You. You are the one true God!” (2) You can approach God with quiet humility and brokenness. Athletes in every major sport love to silence the crowd after a touchdown, slam dunk, or home run by putting an index finger in front of their mouth. How much more so should we be silent before God? Stop for just a moment and reflect on Ps 46:10: “Cease *striving* and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth.”⁴² Now spend a few minutes worshipping our great God. *God’s great power deserves our great awe.*

Scripture References

1 Samuel 6:1–7:1
2 Samuel 6:6–7
Isaiah 6:1–8
Numbers 4:5, 15, 20
Hebrews 4:14–16
Hebrews 12:25–29
Exodus 33:19

Study Questions

1. What theological principles have I learned from the lips or the lives of unbelievers? How can people who don't know God teach me about God? How can I seek to engage unbelievers in spiritual conversations? What topics can I bring up that they may be willing to discuss with me? How can I grow in my listening skills so that I "earn the right" to share my worldview?
2. Roughly 2% of Americans consider themselves atheists. However, in biblical times, there were no atheists. People have always worshiped various "gods." What does this say about humanity? How does this reality increase my confidence as I interact with those who don't have a relationship with Christ?
3. When trouble comes many unbelievers sense a need to atone for sin. What does this innate perception suggest? How can I explain the importance of Jesus Christ's death and substitutionary atonement for sin to those who are open? How can I explain these theological concepts to those who deny universal sin and the need for salvation?
4. How has God demonstrated His sovereignty in my personal circumstances? Have I put the Lord to the test like the Philistines? In what ways did God reveal Himself despite my foolish fleece? How can I strike a balance between two facts: God is totally sovereign and I am wholly accountable?
5. What does it mean to reverence and fear God? Why does God hold His people to a higher standard than the world? Am I doing anything to disrespect God in my life? If so, in what area of my life am I unwilling to become holy? Read Psalm 15. How can I prepare myself for God's presence?

Notes

¹ The “seven months” covers the time from the arrival of the ark in Ashdod (1 Sam 5:1) to the events of 6:1. See David Toshio Tsumura, *First Book of Samuel*. New International Commentary of the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 213.

² See Exod 19:4–6; 29:45–46; Lev 11:45; 26:12.

³ John Woodhouse, *1 Samuel: Looking for a Leader*. Preaching the Word series (Wheaton: Crossway, 2008), 111–12.

⁴ Walter Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel*. Interpretation (Louisville: John Knox, 1990), 39.

⁵ Diviners claimed to be able to predict the future and determine the will of their gods by observing such omens as the flight pattern of birds or the liver of a sacrificed animal (Num 22). God forbid Israel from consulting these religious fortune-tellers (Deut 18:10, 14).

⁶ Bergen remarks: “The present section contains the longest recorded speech given by Philistines in the Old Testament (120 words in the Hebrew), as well as the Old Testament’s longest stretch of dialogue between Philistines (four consecutive statements).” Robert D. Bergen, *1, 2 Samuel*. New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996), 99.

⁷ The NASB follows the reading of the Hebrew text (MT). The Greek OT (LXX) reads differently and suggests that the decision to return the ark was for the purpose of removing the Lord’s hand of judgment from the land.

⁸ This term is attributed to Dale Ralph Davis, *1 Samuel*. Focus on the Bible (Ross-shire: Christian Focus, 2000 [1988]).

⁹ Bill T. Arnold, *1 and 2 Samuel*. New International Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 120.

¹⁰ In Israel the guilt offering served as payment to atone for unintentional sins (see Lev 5:14–19).

¹¹ The Hebrew word for “plague” (*maggepah*, 1 Sam 6:4, 6) is also used to describe the Egyptian plagues in Exod 9:14. The narrator is certainly drawing parallels between these two disasters.

¹² By linking tumors, rats, and plague the theory is strengthened that this was the bubonic plague spread by an infestation of rats, which, like human invaders, were capable of destroying a country (1 Sam 6:5; cf. Jer 36:29; Dan 11:16). Early Greek translations of this text expand the story by inserting the detail that the plague was carried by a swarm of mice. We do know that bubonic plague, which erupts in tumors, is carried by rodents. Peterson suggests that “the gold mice and tumors are set forth as the homeopathic remedy for healing. (Homeopathy operates on the principle that the healing comes from the same source of the illness, but administered in a smaller dose, or in a different form. Vaccination is one application of the principle; “a hair of the dog that bit you” is the equivalent in contemporary folklore.)” Eugene H. Peterson, *First and Second Samuel*. Westminster Bible Companion (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1999), 47.

¹³ Youngblood notes: “Apart from the present context, the only other references to rats/mice in the OT are Leviticus 11:29 and Isaiah 66:17, where they are numbered among ceremonially unclean animals.” Ronald F. Youngblood, “1, 2 Samuel,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), Electronic ed.

¹⁴ Bergen, *1, 2 Samuel*, 100.

¹⁵ Davis, *1 Samuel*, 50.

¹⁶ Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel*, 40.

¹⁷ Gary D. Vreeland, *The Darker Side of Samuel, Saul, and David* (Maitland, FL: Xulon, 2008), 88.

¹⁸ Michael Eaton, *1 Samuel*. Preaching Through The Bible (Kent: Sovereign World, 1995), 30.

¹⁹ There’s a heavy-light motif going on here. God’s “heaviness” (glory) may allow for him to be “light” (ease His hand).

²⁰ The Hebrew word *kabod* translated “glory” (NASB) or “honor” (NET, NIV) is the same word found in Ichabod’s name (1 Sam 4:21–22).

²¹ See also Arnold, *1 and 2 Samuel*, 120; Tsumura, *First Book of Samuel*, 217.

²² Bergen, *1, 2 Samuel*, 100 notes that transporting the ark on a cart as a means of transportation for the ark was expressly forbidden (Num 7:7–9; 2 Sam 6:3–13).

²³ Woodhouse, *1 Samuel*, 116.

²⁴ Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel*, 43 eloquently asserts: “The entire event bespeaks Yahweh’s sovereign way in the world. In our text Yahweh has said nothing, decreed, asserted, required nothing. Yahweh has moved in total, astonishing silence. There is no doubt, however, either for Israel or for the Philistines, that the sovereign will of Yahweh dominates the story. No one speaks in the narrative except the Philistines. Yahweh’s action nonetheless majestically overrides their speech. All flesh see it, and Israel rejoices.”

²⁵ Vreeland, *The Darker Side of Samuel, Saul, and David*, 86.

²⁶ This “Joshua” is not to be confused with Joshua son of Nun, Moses’ successor).

²⁷ Num 3:31; Deut 10:8; 31:9, 25; Josh 3:3; 8:33. See Robert P. Gordon, *I & II Samuel: A Commentary*. Library of Biblical Interpretation series (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 102.

²⁸ Peter J. Leithart, *A Son to Me: An Exposition of 1 & 2 Samuel* (Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 2003), 60.

²⁹ Woodhouse, *1 Samuel*, 119.

³⁰ The same Hebrew verb (*nkh*) is used here as is in the case of the pagan Philistines (cf. 1 Sam 5:6, 9).

³¹ The Hebrew word translated “slaughter” (*makkah*, 1 Sam 6:19) is translated “plague” in 5:6. In the latter case it deals with the Philistines, but in the former, the Israelites.

³² Bergen, *1, 2 Samuel*, 103 n. 71 makes an insightful observation: “The task of the Kohathites would have been parallel to the one performed by Shem and Japheth when they were called upon to cover their father’s nakedness. Cf. Gen 9:23. Instead, the Beth Shemeshites behaved like Ham (Gen 9:22), a fact that probably would not have been lost on the original audience.”

³³ The NET study notes comment: “The number 50,070 is surprisingly large, although it finds almost unanimous textual support in the MT and in the ancient versions. Only a few medieval Hebrew MSS lack ‘50,000,’ reading simply ‘70’ instead. However, there does not seem to be sufficient external evidence to warrant reading 70 rather than 50,070, although that is done by a number of recent translations (e.g., NAB, NIV, NRSV, NLT). The present translation (reluctantly) follows the MT and the ancient versions here.”

³⁴ Bergen, *1, 2 Samuel*, 103 argues that the larger number fits better theologically—if the military might of the Philistines could kill 30,000 Israelites (1 Sam 4:10), in his holiness the sovereign God of Israel could destroy 50,000.

³⁵ No earthly king would have permitted unauthorized persons to casually touch his throne. How much more so God!

³⁶ Bergen, *1, 2 Samuel*, 103.

³⁷ See also John Goldingay, *1 and 2 Samuel for Everyone* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 2010), 39.

³⁸ Sailhamer writes: “The failure of the people to treat the ark rightly after its return is reminiscent of the failure of the people to rebuild the temple after the Exile in the days of Haggai and Zechariah (Hag 1:3).” John Sailhamer, *NIV Compact Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 222.

³⁹ The NEB provides a helpful translation: “No one is safe in the presence of the Lord, this holy God. To whom can we send it, to be rid of him?”

⁴⁰ Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel*, 45–46.

⁴¹ Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel*, 47.

⁴² See also Hab 2:20: “The LORD is in His holy temple. Let all the earth be silent before Him,” and Zech 2:13: “Be silent, all flesh, before the LORD; for He is aroused from His holy habitation.”