

The Philistines Trespass

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Date: 01 January 2000

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[0 : 00] 1st Samuel chapter 6, it's page 250 in the church books. We have been going fairly quickly through to get an idea of the story of the church at a very early period and a very distressingly low period of its history.

And we see that we get little sketches of the way people behave. They're little snapshots of people reacting in different ways.

We've seen, of course, the godly people. We've seen the mother of Samuel and the little boy.

We've seen in the priestly family Eli and his sons and so on.

We've seen the nation. Now, in chapter 6, we see the Philistines, particularly the beginning of chapter 6. And through all this, this is not just an old story, as we've said before.

It is to remind us of the way God acts. It's to encourage us, this is our God. This is the God who's going to act and is acting for us.

[1 : 19] The one who's listening to our prayers. And I think at this period we can take the keynote as being, is the God who is asserting his rights.

Now, in those days, just as today, God was being treated as a nuisance. Someone who had to keep out of other people's business.

And to be pushed on one side. And the Jews, they'd bring him out when they felt they needed him. But the rest of the time he had to mind his own business.

That was the way that they were treating him and the way people treat him today. And I mentioned the word God. But they don't want this God. And what he does, if he comes in and says, and in so many words, in his acts, he says, But I'm God.

Now listen to me. You're not going to have it your own way. Those who rebel. And those who try and assert their own way. And get God out of the way.

[2 : 25] And put him in the dustbin. They find out that he's really there. He asserts himself. Not in the way that necessarily we expect. It's full of surprises.

But he asserts himself. And he asserts it in such a way that people have to admit that he is the way the Bible says he is.

God asserts himself. You can't see him. People try to pretend he's not there. But when we do that, we'll be like the Lord of the Celestines.

We try and push him out. We try and pretend he's not there. But he'll assert. And he'll remind us. And he'll show us what he's like. And the worst thing is, in this world, to be in the position of men who are fighting God.

Pushing him out. Saying, no, no, he doesn't exist. We've passed an act of parliament. He's not allowed to interfere in this, that, and the other. And we have passed an act of parliament for our lives.

[3 : 26] And so, now, I'm going to run this thing my way. And he can get out. And keep out. Unless I need him for something. God says, you'll find out that I'm here all the time.

And I'm going to show you what I'm like. Now, it comes both ways. Of course, for those who rebel, it's a hard lesson to learn. For those who want to follow God, it's a good thing.

We do find out what it's like. And when we're listening to his word, we're praying, and we're seeking him, then, again, he intervenes. So, it's two things at the same time.

There are these people in Israel. Feel them, perhaps. Pray. Lord, help us. We do believe that you're there. We do believe that the Lord is going to keep all his promises.

Despite everything that's happened, despite what people said, and he's working. Well, the chapter 6, and that's what we're going to concentrate on for a few minutes.

[4 : 29] It's the superstitious heathen, the pagans that he's dealing with here. The lords of the Philistines and all their people.

You remember the Philistines, they lived along the sea coast to the west. And they'd come in generations before to a totally different area. But they'd taken up the gods of Canaan, Dagon, and these other people, these other gods.

And they were the great enemies of Israel. They couldn't stand the Israelites. And they hated the God that the Israelites had talked about, this God of righteousness, with all his demand, holiness. They couldn't stand that. And they wanted to stamp it out. And any time they could, as we'd say, put one over on the Israelites, any time they could really get the upper hand with them, it satisfied. Marvellous. Now God was at work here because he had a lesson to teach the Israelites. And it was a sore lesson because they went out to battle, as you remember, carrying the ark, the central object which was used in the worship of God.

[5 : 42] They carried this as a kind of good luck charm, a mascot. God was teaching the Israelites, he's not a mascot. He's not an idol.

He's a living God. And they were devastated to see that the Philistines actually captured the ark and ran off with it. Off they marched to their own lands and to Ashdod, one of the cities, the five cities, and put it in their temple.

Well, that was the one side. But now, God's not finished with the Philistines. They think they have, they've won. They proved that this sublime God, this holy, living, almighty, all-powerful God who just demands attention from everybody, that he doesn't exist.

You see, we've beaten him. We've got this ark. We've put it in the temple like a trophy in a museum. And that proves that our modern, up-to-date religion, our philosophy is right.

You see, there's always this desire. Get rid of this old-fashioned Bible religion with its emphasis upon the need to be changed inside. Oh, we don't want to hear that.

[7 : 05] Let's have an enlightened, scientific view. This was the science of the day. You see, it was a nature religion. They had the idol of Dagon, but this represented one of these nature forces.

The harvest, or whatever it was. We're not sure. But all these idols were just names for the forces of nature. It was just like in a different guise, a different dress.

It was just like modern material. What you can see and what you can touch, this is the ultimate. This is what matters.

Let's get rid of this idea of the transcendent God. And that's what they had done. And we saw last time that they began to come unstuck because as they put the ark of Jehovah, the God of Israel, they went in with this idol.

They got up in the morning and found that the idol had collapsed in front of the ark. The second time they did this, they propped it up. The second time, it was down again and smashed.

[8 : 17] And then following this, there had come this plague, an epidemic on the people. And they began to realise they were playing with fire when they were playing about with God.

You can't do that and get away with it. This plague, everything was going wrong. We read about these emeralds, an old-fashioned word. Seems just to me to have meant oils.

And the reference to mice, it's thought they're not mice, but rats we'd call them, big creatures.

Presumably it was bubonic plague.

We don't know. This is very likely. However, the minor details are not important. That all fits very neatly.

It may have been something else. But let us assume it was that, that the land was overcome with rats and carrying the fleas and the virus, or the bacillus of the bubonic plague, and hundreds of people, thousands of them were struck down.

[9 : 24] And many of them started dying. And they began to be less confident that they could control nature. And things were on their side. And things were going well. And they wanted to get rid of the ark. And they started sending it round from one city to another.

And then the plague went with it. And they wanted to get rid of it. And this is where we get next. How can we get rid of the ark? Because this God is real, after all.

We don't know what he's like. We don't want to have anything to do with him. But we want to get rid of him. Now we need to remember, I think, today, if we're believers, that our God can act.

He can intervene. We tend to think that when the church gets low, and we're in trouble, and we can't seem to make any impact upon the world around, oh dear, you know, what do we do?

And then we start thinking, well, we need some new techniques. No, no. No new techniques. Let's keep to the, let's keep to God's techniques. And remember that God can intervene.

[10:30] God's got his finger on people. God brings, brings the lesson home. Sometimes in a terrible way. Maybe, perhaps you've read about the time, this just occurs to me, when God was working in South London very, very strongly, a hundred years ago, more than that now, a hundred and thirty years ago, and this young preacher from the country had come in Spurgeon, and he'd come to this little church, about the size of this foot, with galleries, and it had been filled with people.

They'd absolutely been gripped and come in, and it was overflowing, and they didn't have the, the room to accommodate them all, in their time. They had to fire the, a great concert hall in, in, in, in some pleasure gardens on the outskirts of the city.

And then on Sundays, this place was absolutely, absolutely, filled. And, eventually, they built a near, a big church nearby, a vast place in Philadelphia.

They, they left the, they left the, this concert hall, the music hall, as it was called, in the Surrey Gardens. Well, the point I'm making here, when they left, the group of, rather disreputable actors came in, and they, they started putting on, satirical shows, and so on and about.

All these people getting, worked up about religion. And this was taken into the, mentioned in the church, and people were upset about, the kind of, scurrilous, and the very bitter, attacks that were being made.

[12:17] And, um, the church didn't go, and start throwing stones, through the window, or barricading, and having demonstrations, outside the, outside the theatre, when people were going in.

They didn't do anything like that. They just said, well, the prayer meeting, we'll pray about it. Of course, this was heard by the actors. Ha, ha, ha, they're praying, they're praying about us tonight. Ha, ha.

Only that night, something went wrong. Now, I can't remember all the things, that they were going to have shown in some, someone fell off the stage, and injured himself. Then the next day, part of the scenery collapsed.

And then the next day, this was going wrong, and that, and it, at first thing, they, when something went wrong, they made a joke of it. Ha, ha, they must be praying about us tonight. Crash, something else goes wrong.

And this became terribly, oh dear, they're praying about us again, because something else, is going wrong. God, in his providence, the way things are working, is reminding those people.

[13:17] They're not playing around, with a few, or a few hundred, ordinary people. They're trifling, with the God, who is, who is, in control, of the universe.

The living God, in his hands, we are. And these men, are trifling, and they had done. But now, they're filtered of fear, and they want more, and more to get rid, of the ark.

The ark of the Lord, was in the country, of the Philistines, seven months, and the Philistines, called for the priests, and the diviners, saying, what shall we do, to the ark, of the Lord, Jehovah, tell us, wherewith, we shall send it, to his place.

How can we get rid, of it? You see, they're not, they're becoming aware, that there is, something, real, behind the name of God, but they're not, trying to find him.

They're trying to get rid of him. It's, a kind of fear, but no faith, no trust. When we, wake up, to God, what we need to do, is to find him.

[14:28] These men are doing the opposite. How can we get rid of him? Yes, there is something more, than the nature, worship, and so on, that we're admitting, but let's get rid of it. Too big for us. It's frightening. It's disturbing.

Let's get rid of it. People are doing that, all the time. People are doing it, you're passing him the street, all the time. They know, that God is alive and real, but they're saying, oh let's forget about this.

Don't talk to me about religion. I don't want to know. I want to get, I want some peace and quiet. Now let's just forget it. What's on the box? Let's switch on, and forget about it. That's what they were doing.

So we see, that, these are modern people. You see, it's so up to date. The Philistines, verse 2, called for the priests, and the diviners.

The priests, well of course, they're not, they're not calling for the, the men who are set up by, the Lord, to teach the people, and believe in worship. You know, this is the, they're going back, to the, the practitioners, of the mumbo jumbo, the magic, and the spells, and so on, in the temple, and Ekron, and Ashtar, and so on.

[15 : 41] They're just going back to that. But more than that, you see, it's just, to the diviners, then what is a diviner? Well, to divine something, is to tell fortunes.

They're the fortune tellers. It comes from the, the word, the way of reading, the way that means to read, the way things fall. If you, if you, if you, have a cup of tea, drink the tea, and then somebody comes in, now the way that the tea leaves, has fallen, ah, well, I've showed you, whether you're going to, whether you're going to get married, next year, or not.

You see, that they can read, the tea leaves, or they can, they can tell you, the way things, are falling out, fortune tellers, the way the stars, are falling out, to predict the way, that you're going to, um, get on to the next year.

Astrology, magic, spiritualism, these are the, the, the things, which these men, were, um, supposedly expert in.

It's back, away from God, to, dealing with things, that you can, you can touch and see. Oh, well, you know, we've got to have guidance, we've got to know, what's right, well, we're going to, the way things are falling out.

[16 : 57] Now, you know, if, um, if you see a black cat, well, that means something, or, um, any physical, back to nature, worshipping nature, now, sometimes it's called science, sometimes it's called, um, fortune tellers.

They see that the, the physical things, these are the things, that really matter, the powers of the universe, the physical things around us, and these are controlling, and these are the things that matter.

Now, that's, that's as old as creation. It's as old as a human race. And yet, you, to open any magazine today, and it's got the same thing, people are turning to the diviners.

Gypsy So-So gives you this, what the stars say about your love life this week. And every woman's magazine, practically, has got this rubbish in it. You can even dial a number, from British Telecom, and you get the diviners on the other end.

It's, where, where people just don't want to know God, they immediately fall into this kind of, vaguely rubbish. even people who, who are educated, and they, they, they think that they can discuss, nuclear physics, and, and all the rest of it, and yet, when they reject God, they're putting in, that is the same place, as the most ignorant savage, in the jungles of Brazil.

[18 : 26] And that's where our people are today. This is where our nation is. Back in the jungle, running around in, in, in, in skins and war paint. Er, spiritually.

What the Bible calls it, beggarly rudiments. If you neglect the living God, you're back, rubbing around in the dirt. The, the, weak and beggarly rudiments.

Here they are. Oh well, you know, you see, but they don't, they don't call it that divine. Now these are the real, chast belts. You see, they can tell you about the vibrations, and what's the, the good, the good day to do this.

And they, they've got this great, secret knowledge. It's all dressed up, in words, and it's the same, rubbish underneath. Let's get the experts. Let's call in the men, that really know.

Of course they don't know. What's the hope? How do you deal, with the living God? This is the God, he's concerned of plague, in certain areas. This is, this is the God, he's going to call the whole earth, to judgment.

[19 : 28] He's going to wrap, the whole earth up, the whole way, that the world, and the universe is acting. He's going to bring it to a close, he's going to wrap it up, and he's going to get everyone, living in debt, who has ever lived, before he's grown, to judgment.

Now, what are these diviners, going to say about that? They've got nothing to say. Now we're using up, a lot of our sign, but we see them, we see they, they just say, oh, well perhaps, maybe.

Let's just dive forward, so we get the whole, um, uh, thing, in verse nine, you see, they, they, we'll get onto this, that, but we see, they, they have this way of, they think they may be able to find out, what the cause of it was, and they do this, and see if it goes up, by the way, of his own coast, to Beth Shemesh, that's the first town over the border in Israel, uh, sending the, the ark on a cart.

Then, if it goes that way, he has, God has done this great, us this great evil, but if not, then we shall know that it was not his hand that smote us, it was a chance, that happened to us.

But what's the good of that? Either it will be, either it is, or it isn't. But what's your answer to it?

They've got no answer at all. And the, and anything but the word of God, and the gospel of Jesus Christ, has got no, no answer, to any man.

[20 : 59] What's your answer to life, and the future? When we fall into the hands of God, and we stand before his judgment, what's your answer? What answer has anyone got, except the answer that God himself gives?

These are just, like, so many of the so-called experts, theologians, ministers, so-called ministers today, oh, well, perhaps, perhaps not, make your own mind up, they've got no answer.

Well, they'd better find out one of them pretty quickly, because, we're soon out of this world, and we're soon, called, for the judgment. Now, we'll listen to the experts.

Well, we'll tell you what you ought to do. We'll just, quickly go on, and, and, uh, look at the next verse, so that we can see something of the story.

They, this is their answer. Here we come, here it comes, marvellous. Verse 3, and they said, if ye send away the ark of the God of Israel, send it not empty, but in any wise return him a trespass offering, then ye shall be healed, and it shall be known to you why his hand is not removed from you.

[22 : 14] What do they say? Well, they say, well, you better not, you better get rid of it, but you better not send it off on its own, because you've got to offer something. Now, this trespass offering, of course, it would be something that was known in Israel.

There were certain sacrifices, which were part of the worship, and when God, people in, in repentance were coming back to God, there was certain offerings they could make, and that was a sign.

If they came in faith, through God's way, that he would accept them. There was an offering, which God would accept, for their trespass, the way that they'd offended him in some way.

Now, so, up to a point, the diviners are right, they say, now, you see, well, they say, you may, perhaps, have offended Jehovah.

You've done something wrong. He's offended. Now, so don't just send the ark back. You'd better send him a present, a trespass offering, with it.

[23 : 26] Put that with it, so that he won't be sent back empty, and that'll, that'll smooth things over. You'll be healed, and you'll know exactly what you've done wrong.

They don't say to know what they had done wrong. They didn't profess to know. So, verse 4, they say, what shall be the trespass offering, which we shall return to him?

So, the diviners and the priests answered, five golden emeralds, and five golden mice, according to the number of the lords of the Philistines, for one lord, one plague, was on you all, and on your lord. They said, now, this is what you need to do. You need to make jewels out of gold, representing the disease, that was sent upon you.

And, one for every, one of the, the state, city states, making up the Philistine Federation. There were five, five city states in the Federation, so that, you've got to make five little models in gold, of the boils, that the people were suffering from, and five little models of, well, perhaps it was meant to be rats, rats, or mice.

[24 : 50] Put them in the box, and that would put things right. You see, you'll be healed, and that would be okay. Should we think, we think we're pretty sure, that that would be the right thing to do.

What do they do? Well then, this, again, is so modern, they're fobbing God off. Well, what we always do, is we make these little gold things.

You see, it's a votive offering. You go to any of these shrines, and what do you find? The votive offering. There's the, the Madonna, what it is, whatever it is.

Oh, well, it offered a prayer to make my ear better. So you have a little golden ear, or something, it may not be gold, it may be just made out of plastic, or something. The votive offering, it's basic, it's a pagan religion.

Let's just, try this with God. You see, make this as a, a, a trespass offering, a little thing, a little present, well, it's gold, it costs quite a few pounds, to make these things, five, five each, well, quite a, you know, quite a bit, was involved in that.

[25 : 58] That'll be the trespass offering, and that'll put us right. You see, that, that's just what people do today. Let's fob God off. I think, I think, God isn't like, isn't pleased with me.

I think I'm not right with God. What can I do? Well, I'll give him a little something. I'll put, I'll put a fiver in the collection this week. Now that, that really is going to be, er, generous.

I'm going to, I'm going to say a little prayer. I think I'll do it. I remember hearing, poor old lady, say she, she'd been sending a little, a little, um, booklet, really for children.

It was so pathetic. She said, now what I do, you see, I read that little booklet every, every night before I go to sleep. Some poor, little act.

Now that, that will put us right with God. But what God requires is repentance and seeking him. Don't say, well, we're giving this little thing and then that'll be him.

[26 : 59] He'll, that'll, that'll keep him quiet and out of the way and then we don't want to hear from him anymore and we want everything to go right. God says, everything won't go right for you until you repent, until you seek me.

See, what God wants is not more ceremonies, more little gold, trinkets, more statues and this, that, now, all these things we can go on forever making up little things that are supposed to be religious and pleasing God at special days, special ceremonies, all the rest of it.

But God doesn't want that. In fact, it's an offence to him because he says, what I want is repentance. I want your heart. I want you to seek me and to listen to what I'm saying.

And wherever, you see, we're really dodging the issue, we get on to this. It's formality. It's going through a form, going through a show. That's what they were doing.

They were just going through a show. And that's what millions of people are doing and they think they're being religious. They think they're being Christian. And they're not. God says, seek me with all your heart.

[28 : 10] Thou shall love the Lord my God with all thy heart and mind and soul and strength. Beware from formality. You see, it just comes out naturally.

It's just part of our nature. to be formal. A guilt offering. What is the guilt offering? You see, very often, I think you'll agree, no, people get it half right.

They say, we think you've done it, you've done something wrong, we've offended this Jehovah and he's there. Well, you'd better send a guilt offering. Right. I will make it five little golden miles.

Rubbish. He needs a guilt offering. You've got to have something to bring before God because of your sin. But making some little trinkets out of gold or anything that you can do, there's nothing that you can do.

You've got to have the great offering. You've got to have the great offering. So what's the great offering? Well, it's the offering that God himself has provided.

[29 : 20] That's what he has revealed in history. Now, I'll have to draw to a close now and leave the rest of the story. But that's what he's revealed to us.

We know who the offering is. It's the Son of God himself. The Lord Jesus Christ who came into the world and became man. And what did he do?

He came to make himself an offering for sin. And the irony in this world is people are saying, well, I don't want to get too involved in this business about repentance and faith in Christ.

I have a bit of religion just to make things go well, to oil the wheels, to make things smooth. I'll have a bit of religion. I'll be willing to help and put a bit of money in the collection and this sort of thing.

What's the good of that when you're neglected? The very Son of God who says, come to me and be healed. This is that we've got to have the perfect offering to offer to God for all our sins.

[30 : 24] There's only one. That's Christ Jesus. Now, I've taken up a long, long time really and we haven't got very far but let's just leave it here. Now, where is your trespass offering?

Where is your personal one? Or mine for that matter? Where is it? We've got to have the perfect, perfect offering. And there is that ironically.

It's not something that we can make. We can't. You see, if we try to give anything else, it's just trash. They were treating Jehovah like another idol. Oh, we'll just put a thing, golden things in a box in front and do right for Dagon.

any of these, Dagon would be quite happy because he doesn't exist. We can do this, we can just offer God trash and treat him like an idol.

But his view of us and of our need is attracting and sees into our hearts and our lives. He sees what's wrong with us and he demands that that should be covered over.

[31 : 30] Now, there's only one thing. If we cover our trespasses and sins from his side, it is the blood of Jesus Christ. And we have to take refuge over that. And we come to God and say, Lord, I'm coming in Christ.

I'm holding on to that promise in Christ. And I want you to accept me in him. When we come in that way, God, we have the assurance of God's work that he does accept us.

Well, may he bless to us these thoughts in his word. Let us pray. O Lord, our gracious God, we thank thee for the way that thou hast provided an offering for sin.

And we pray for each one of us that we may not be deluded to think that anything else will satisfy thy divine justice. Deal with us, O God, according to the riches of thy mercy in Christ.

And deliver us, O God, from the delusions of the natural heart. Save us, O God, from formality, a mere show which looks good to men that is empty before God.

[32 : 46] O Lord, our God, help us, we pray. And draw near, bless us, and free us from every plague that would destroy us. For Jesus' sake, Amen.