

1st Samuel 6

Verses 1 – 3

Now the ark of the LORD had been in the territory of the Philistines for seven months. ² And the Philistines called for the priests and the diviners, saying, “What are we to do with the ark of the LORD? Tell us how we may send it to its place.” ³ And they said, “If you are going to send the ark of the God of Israel away, do not send it empty; but you shall certainly return to Him a guilt offering. Then you will be healed, and it will be revealed to you why His hand does not leave you.”

² And the Philistines called for the priests and the diviners, saying, “What are we to do with the ark of the LORD? Tell us how we may send it to its place.”

The priests mentioned here were the ones in charge of the worship of Dagon. The diviners were the ones who used magical means to reveal future events or answer difficult questions.

See Genesis 44:4-5

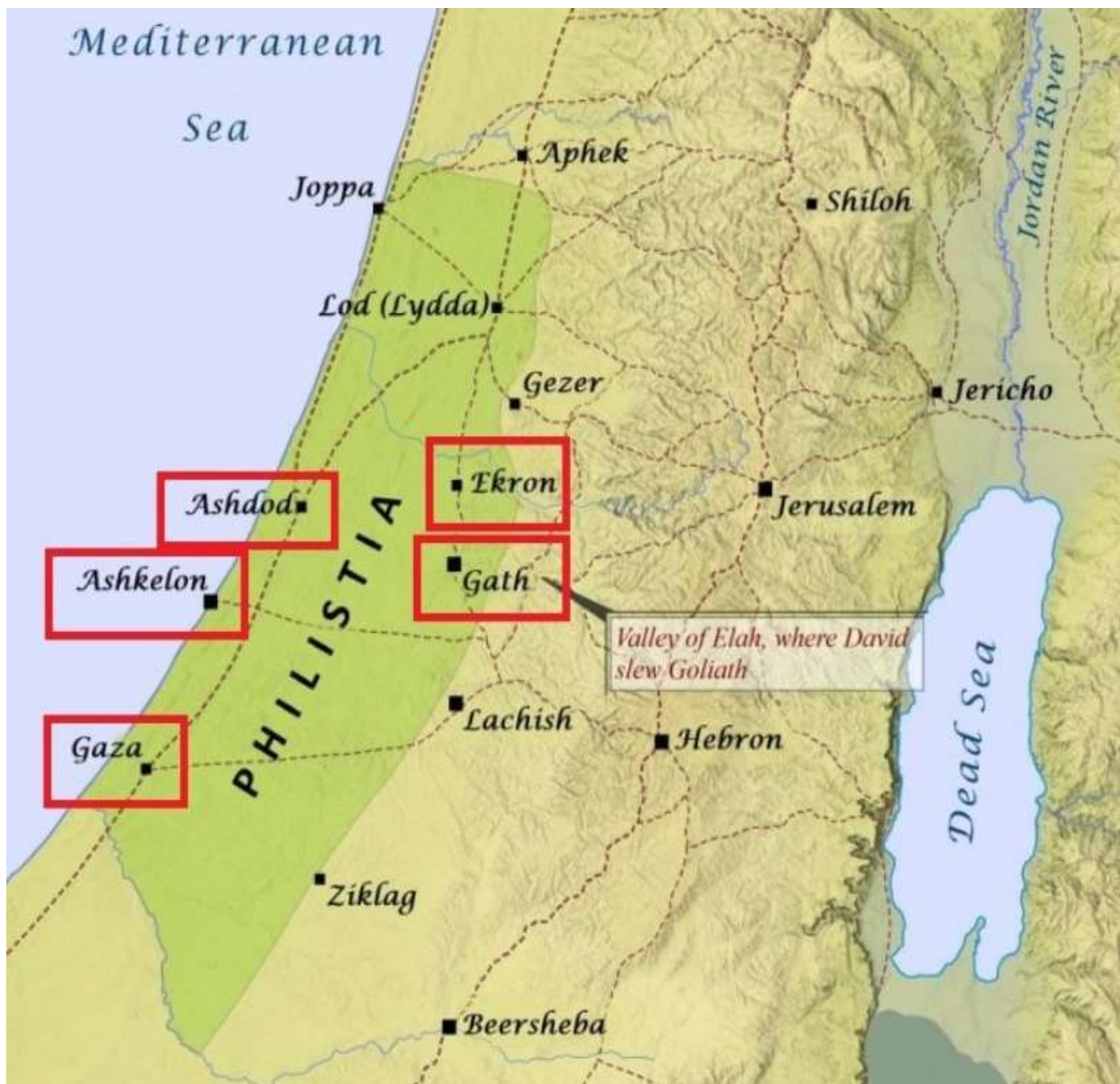
Verses 4 - 9

⁴ Then they said, “What is to be the guilt offering that we shall return to Him?” And they said, “Five gold tumors and five gold mice *corresponding to* the number of the governors of the Philistines, since one plague was on all of you and on your governors. ⁵ So you shall make likenesses of your tumors and likenesses of your mice that are ruining the land, and you shall give glory to the God of Israel; perhaps He will lighten His hand from you, your gods, and your land. ⁶ 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 let the people go, and they left? ⁷ Now then, take and prepare a new cart and two milk cows on which there has never been a yoke; and hitch the cows to the cart and take their calves back home, away from them. ⁸ Then 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 saddlebag by its side. Then send it away that it may go. ⁹ But watch: if it goes up by the way of its own territory to Beth-shemesh, then He has done this great evil to us. But if not, then we will know that it was not His hand that struck us; it happened to us by chance.”

⁴ Then they said, “What is to be the guilt offering that we shall return to Him?” And they said, “Five gold tumors and five gold mice corresponding to the number of the governors of the Philistines, since one plague was on all of you and on your governors.” ⁵ So you shall make likenesses of your tumors and likenesses of your mice that are ruining the land, and you shall give glory to the God of Israel; perhaps He will lighten His hand from you, your gods, and your land

The Ark was only taken to 3 of the 5 major cities in Philistia. However, all 5 regions of Philistia (meaning all of Philistia) were affected.

See map 605



The mice were a devastating plague on the land. Alexander the Great (356 – 323 BC) relates that during harvest time entire crops were sometimes destroyed by field-mice in a single night.

Some people believe the mice may have been the source of the tumors. However, for those who want to see this plague as a naturalistic event it should be noted that Israel was not affected. Did these mice restrict their movement to the borders of Philistia? ☺

⁶ 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 let the people go, and they left?

This indicates that the deliverance of Israel from bondage in Egypt was well known.

The Egyptians waited until their country was destroyed, and then they still had to let the people go, so it would have been wise to do it much sooner. By moving the Ark to 3 different cities before they made the decision to return it to Israel shows that the Philistines had hardened their hearts much like the Egyptians had done.

⁷ Now then, take and prepare a new cart and two milk cows on which there has never been a yoke; and hitch the cows to the cart and take their calves back home, away from them. ⁸ Then 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 saddlebag by its side. Then send it away that it may go.

The Philistines didn't know that the Ark should only be carried by the staves (wooden poles covered by gold) so God overlooked them using a cart.

The Philistines assumed a guilt offering was needed so they sent articles of gold (mice & tumors) to atone for their sin in taking the Ark of God.

⁹ But watch: if it goes up by the way of its own territory to Beth-shemesh, then He has done this great evil to us. But if not, then we will know that it was not His hand that struck us; it happened to us by chance.

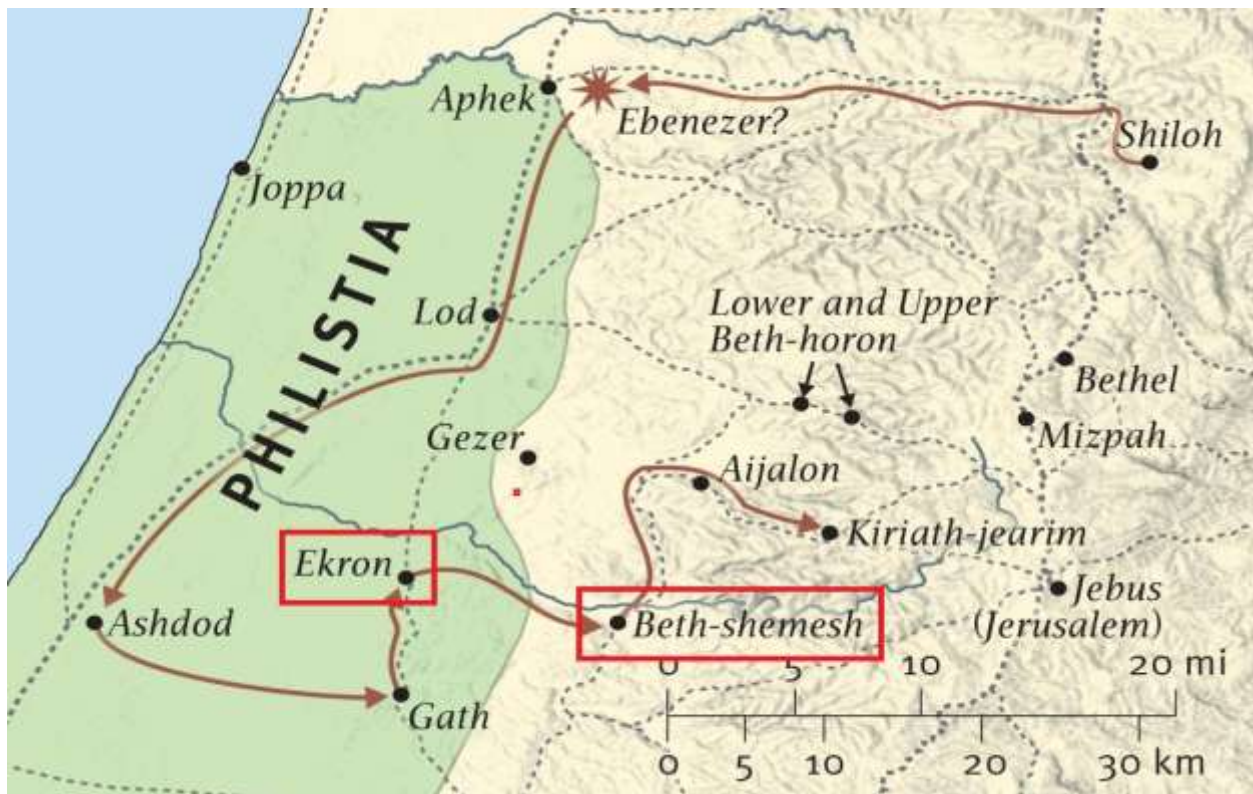
They were uncertain as to whether or not God was responsible for the plagues so they devised a test to determine if it was a judgment from God or if it happened by chance.

Verses 10 - 16

¹⁰ Then the men did so: they took two milk cows and hitched them to the cart, and shut in their calves at home. ¹¹ And they put the ark of the Lord on the cart, and the saddlebag with the gold mice and the likenesses of their tumors. And the governors of the Philistines followed them to the border of Beth-shemesh. ¹³ Now *the people of Beth-shemesh* were gathering in their wheat harvest in the valley, and they raised their eyes and saw the ark, and rejoiced at seeing *it*. ¹⁴ And the cart came into the field of Joshua the Beth-shemite and stopped 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. ¹⁵ And the Levites took down the ark of the Lord and the saddlebag 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. ¹⁶ When the five governors of the Philistines saw *it*, they returned to Ekron that day.

¹² Now the cows went straight in the direction of Beth-shemesh; they went on the same road, bellowing as they went, and did not turn off to the right or to the left.

See map 610



Beth-shemesh means house of the sun god. It was located on the north border of Judah near the Philistines.

The cows took the cart directly to Israel without going to the right or the left during this seven mile trip.

¹³ Now *the people of Beth-shemesh* were gathering in their wheat harvest in the valley, and they raised their eyes and saw the ark, and rejoiced at seeing *it*.

The wheat harvest took place during the months of May, June & July.

See chart 615

	March	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sept
Barley	x	x	x				
Flax	x	x	x				
Wheat			x	x	x		
Figs			x	x	x		
Grapes				x	x		
Pomegranates				x	x		
Olives					x	x	
Dates						x	x
Figs 2nd crop						x	x

¹⁴ And the cart came into the field of Joshua the Beth-shemite and stopped 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.

For over 300 years all sacrifices had to be offered at Shiloh but the city of Shiloh was destroyed by the Philistines in chapter 4 and God had not appointed a new place for the Tabernacle yet.

One mistake they did make was offering cows (female animals) for a burnt-offering, contrary to Leviticus 1:3. See below.

² “**Speak to the sons of Israel and say to them, ‘When anyone of you brings an offering to the LORD, you shall bring your offering of livestock from the herd or the flock. ³ If his offering is a burnt offering from the herd, he shall offer a male without defect; he shall offer it at the doorway of the tent of meeting, so that he may be accepted before the LORD.**

¹⁵ **And the Levites took down the ark of the Lord and the saddlebag 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. ¹⁶ When the five governors of the Philistines saw *it*, they returned to Ekron that day.**

This town was designated a city of the Levites in the days of Joshua.

See Joshua 21:16

¹³ **So to the sons of Aaron the priest they gave Hebron, the city of refuge for the one who commits manslaughter, with its pasture lands, Libnah with its pasture lands, ¹⁴ Jattir with its pasture lands, Eshtemoa with its pasture lands, ¹⁵ Holon with its pasture lands, Debir with its pasture lands, ¹⁶ Ain with its pasture lands, Juttah with its pasture lands, and Beth-shemesh with its pasture lands; nine cities from these two tribes.**

The people of Beth-shemesh were glad to see the Ark and the men of the town offered burnt offerings and sacrificed sacrifices making it like a feast day.

Verses 17 -18

¹⁷ **Now these are the gold tumors which the Philistines returned as a guilt offering to the Lord: one for Ashdod, one for Gaza, one for Ashkelon, one for Gath, *and* one for Ekron; ¹⁸ and the gold mice, corresponding to the number of all the cities of the Philistines belonging to the five governors, both of fortified cities and of country villages. The large stone on which they placed the ark of the Lord *is a witness* to this day in the field of Joshua the Beth-shemite.**

The gold tumors represented a guilt offering for the 5 major cities of the Philistines.

The gold mice represented all the other cities under the leadership of the 5 governors.

All of Philistia was considered guilty.

Verse 19 - 21

¹⁹ Now He fatally struck some of the men of Beth-shemesh because they had looked into the ark of the Lord. He struck 50,070 men among the people, and the people mourned because the Lord had struck the people with a great slaughter.

²⁰ And the men of Beth-shemesh said, “Who is able to stand before the Lord, this holy God? And to whom will He go up from us?” ²¹ 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 yourselves.”

¹⁹ Now He fatally struck some of the men of Beth-shemesh because they had looked into the ark of the Lord. He struck 50,070 men among the people, and the people mourned because the Lord had struck the people with a great slaughter.

The death of 50,000 men was a horrific event and the impact it must have had on all of the families of these men is unspeakable.

The Levites of the city should have known better and they should have stopped their fellow citizens from looking into the Ark.

See Numbers 4:20

²⁰ but they shall not come in to see the holy *objects* even for a moment, or they will die.”

The RSV & NIV say 70 men were struck dead with a footnote that says most Hebrew Manuscripts say 50,070 men. The KJV, ASV and the Septuagint say 50,070.

It should make any bible student wonder why the RSV & NIV use 70 men when they admit in a footnote that most Hebrew manuscripts have 50,070.

Verse 19 says, **the Lord had struck the people with a great slaughter**. Does 70 men sound like a great slaughter? The wording of this verse favors the larger number not the lesser number.

²¹ 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 yourselves.”

See map 620

