

What do you learn about God's 1) freedom 2) power 3) holiness from this passage?

Has this changed your view of God in any way?

How do you show your reverence for God? Are you ever at risk of being irreverent?

What might this passage tell us about what God thinks about other faiths?

## Pray

This study has been written to accompany a sermon series at St Columb's Anglican Church Hawthorn. It is written for small group and personal study. It is meant as a resource so feel free to select the parts that are most useful to you or your group. It is advised that you at least do the section "Getting Inside the Passage," some parts of "Personal Application" and "Pray." The section "Going Further" will take you further into the 1 Samuel and the Bible as a whole.

With acknowledgement and thanks to Rev. Peter MacPherson  
St Alfred's Nth Blackburn



# 1 Samuel 6 Small Group Study Material

## God's Freedom & Power

### Context

1 Samuel 4-6 are a unit. They are sometimes called "the ark narrative." They tell of the ark's capture by the Philistines (chap. 4), its power over the Philistines' gods (chap. 5) and its return to Israel (chap 6). In the process of this narrative we learn about God's freedom, power and holiness.

At the end of this passage we read that the ark is taken to Kiriath Jearim where it would remain for the next 20 years (1 Sam 7:1-2) until David had it brought to Jerusalem (2 Sam 6).

### Getting Inside the Passage

1-12 The Philistines return the ark.

Why is it important to send the ark back with a "guilt offering"? vv.3-6

What are the Philistines testing by sending the ark back in the way they do? Vv7-9

What does this test suggest about the Philistine understanding of Yahweh?

Note the irony of this incident: the Philistines think they are getting rid of Yahweh!

13-21 The ark returns to Israel.

Note the mixed response that the presence of the ark causes. First the people rejoice (v.13) but once they have experienced God's power they ask for the ark to be removed (v.21).

People attend to the ark with initial reverence but then tragedy strikes (v.19). Why do these men die?

### **Going Further**

In chapter 5:1-5 we see Dagon brought low by Yahweh. There is a theological as well as a military battle going on between the Israelites and the Philistines. This helps us understand the constant warring that goes on in the books of Samuel.

How does the fall of Dagon anticipate the fate of another Philistine hero, Goliath in chapter 17?

The Philistines are an example of how some people fail to acknowledge God even though God has revealed himself to them. Their system of faith has been judged and condemned. Another example is the people of Gadara who though they have seen Jesus heal the demoniac ask him to leave them alone (Luke 8:26-37).

See what Paul has to say about this in Romans 1:18-19.

We begin to learn something about God's freedom in 1 Samuel 4-6.

Yahweh is not bound to the ark; he shapes history independently of the symbol of his presence. Israel must recognise that the Lord is present even when the place of his self-revelation has vanished.

This is an extraordinarily far-reaching insight. Jesus will become the locus of God's presence (cf John 1:1-14) but he points to a new reality in his conversation with the woman of Samaria John 4:19-24. (...God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth." v.24).

The "ark narrative" shows that coming into God's presence is dangerous. The ark is to be treated reverently because it is associated with God's presence. See also Num 4:17-20, 2 Sam 6:7.

### **Personal Application**

The Philistines test God's will by seeking something that is unlikely and out of the norm. Another example is Gideon in Judges 6.

Have you ever sought God's guidance by asking that he do something unusual?

Do you think it is still permissible to seek guidance in such ways?