**Series**: The Book of 1 Samuel

**Title**: Scrambling for Victory

**Scripture**: 1 Samuel 5-6

**Description:** Perhaps the greatest occupation of mankind is to keep the True God away!

# Intro

* 1 Sam 5-6 is about the 'Ark'; captured; moving through 3 Philistine cities and back to Israel (don't think 'geography' as much as 'people' - Philistines were occupying Canaan, and had taken over these Israelite cities!)
* NB: interchangeable reference to 'the Ark of God' and 'the LORD' Yhwh Himself. A stunning proposition in our material-centric world; That there was a material presence, that could be identified with this box of wood and gold : a 'geospatial' location of God, His Presence - and hence "Indiana Jones" and the fascination with "where's the Ark today?!" (I believe it's rotten somewhere, - in fact Jer3:16 "*they shall no more say, "The ark of the covenant of the LORD." It shall not come to mind or be remembered or missed; it shall not be made again*" - Probably pillaged for gold. God does that so that people won't worship objects of creation, but the Creator Himself!, cf 2Ki18:4, Nehushtan) - *This is not about a box, but the Self-Revealing Yhwh*
* **God's Unveiled Presence can be material, spatial** - isn't that the mystery of Jesus... and that is the hope we look forward to - in Heaven!

# Theme

* It's a chaotic 7 months as the presence of God appears in 4 cities, and they're concluded with 2 questions - this is the conclusion to which the men of Beth Shemesh come: in 6:20

20 Then the men of Beth-shemesh said, "Who is able to stand before the LORD, this holy God?   
And to whom shall he go up away from us?"

* You can hear they're resigned; But it almost invites a challenge - like spectators watching failing contestants - "I could!! This is the human spirit - to "be the man" - it's elating to win competitions, isn't it! (Even by chance!) To be spot-lighted, rewarded, honoured. There's an innate desire to overcome, and when we come together it can be a clambering competition, a **scrambling for victory**! [ILLUS: There's an excitement at the names of these overcomers: Bezos, Musk - whose fortunes can pay the GDP of several countries! There's a whole world out there - 10 year old boys getting excited over " PewDiePie"; starglazed eyes thinking of 30million viewers and R60m per year - **Yeah**! That's what I want to do!]
* The same has happened in 1Sam4 - The Philistines have gloriously flattened the Israelite army (4:17), and walked away with Israel's prize possession. "*The Ark of Israel's God*";
* (Makes you want to cringe, right? - because the conclusion is, "Who is able to stand before the LORD?")
* Now as we read each section, we see how the question arises.

PRAY

# Read

" Who is able to stand before the LORD"?

## Will it be the god of the Philistines? (5:1-5, READ)

* **No . Dagon will not be able to stand before the LORD**
* Archaeology reveals that dagon was worshiped before even Abram's time. And he became the father of Baal - of which we read much.
* Dagon is the god of the Philistines; they've him his own house - a temple, where he stands.
* So at the defeat of Israel, coming into their camp at Ebenezer, "Look what we've found!" And cart it off as a prize - ignorant that Israel had made the same mistake.
  + Something significant here is that in 1Chron10:10 we read that the Philistined, "fastened Saul's head in the temple of Dagon" - the decapitated head in a temple was a great symbol of conquest over a ruler.
* Thus, Dagons head and hands wind up sprawled on the temple threshold, before the presence of Yhwh, and their pagan worship is forever altered: Dagon's head and hands touched the threshold - don't step there!

## Will it be the "Lords of the Philistines"? (5:6-12, READ)

* **No . The 5 lords will not be able to stand before the LORD**, though these 5 tyrants commanded the armies and trust of their people.
* The lords gathered for 2 conferences; they were the keynote speakers. The first conference (in v8) was at Ashdod, and the organisers appointed this theme: "***Help us***: What shall *we* do with the Ark?!". "**Bring it around** to Gath!". The second conference (in v11) was at Ekron, and those organisers titled it, "***Obey us***: Send **away** this Ark!"
* It's a progressive failure - 3 cities and utter panic. In was so bad that the news arrived before the Ark (10 - *But as soon as the ark of God came to Ekron, the people of Ekron cried out, "They have brought around to us the ark of the God of Israel to kill us and our people*); Tumors, Boils, Haemorrhoids, Mice and Plague; They learn quickly that this deathly pandemic goes where "*the Ark of the God of Israel*" goes.
* Once scrambling to capture the Ark, now scrambling to get it away! But the 5 Lords are unable to deliver, and in v11b-12, "The hand of the God was very heavy" - No man was untouched...desperate cries filled the air.

## Was this just co-incidence?

Now it wouldn't be unreasonable to suggest that these events could be just coincidence, interpreted by wishful religious people as divine signs.

* + Couldn't the statue of dagon have toppled over by chance the first time, and cracked, so that it was weak enough to topple a second time and break off its hands and head - those are obvious points of stress.
  + 'So what!' if the threshold of dagon is not walked on till this day - that could be just myth and superstition.
  + And the pandemic - we know how it is. The Hebrews had hygenic rituals, but the Philistines? A bad disease could get transmitted by contact, even as they moved the Ark from one city to the next so that it looks like it's the Ark doing it!
* ... **Which is why ch6:1-18 was recorded** (**READ 6:1-18**)
  + The diviners and priests know how their religion works - they had the same question! But now there's no doubt; The lords turn around and go home; Last time they left Israel they were victorious; Now defeated.

## The third group:

* *"Who is able to stand before the LORD*?"
* How about **the Israelites, the men of Beth-Shemesh themselves**, God's own chosen nation?
* **READ** 6:19-21
* **No . The Israelites will not be able to stand before the LORD**
* "They looked upon" the LORD - *without an atoning sacrifice*. They've come full circle from Hophni and Phineas!
* (Their response in v21 is predictable... on one hand terrifying, on another, humorous!)

# This Holy God

The account concludes with 2 questions:

Who is able to stand before the LORD, this holy God?   
And to whom shall he go up away from us?

- the second question is saying the same thing from another angle: If we cannot stand before Him, how can we get Him away from us?!

I'd like to point out their confession is 3 words - 3 overwhelming realities that will confront anyone who encounters the LORD's presence: ***This Holy God - a definition, a distinction, a description***

**They confess A Definition: God** - Elohim: Everyone knows what a god is - a supreme being, of great power, beyond the physical realm; Many in the Western 1st world see gods as folklore and fantasy (atheism), but others accept the existence of gods - **mono**theism (only one god), **poly**theism (many gods), **pan**theism (everything is god) - and whoever you speak to will have their own rationale to support or discount their existence.

The first overwhelming reality from 7 months of encounter, is there is no question that **YHWH - whom the Hebrews** worship is not a fable,but a God,. He's not a coincidence of imaginations. Samuel could say - Go and look! See the Philistines avoid walking where dagon's hands and head lay! Go and look! See the great stone in the field of Joshua of Beth-Shemesh - there where the cows arrived! Go look at the 5 golden tumors and many mice, which we received from our ENEMIES!

**They also confess A Distinction: *This*** *God* - In other words, He is different. In a world of many so-called gods, gods who are named and worshiped, around whom people build their lives - this God is incomparable. He *does not* ***submit*** to man: He is *not* ***formed*** by religion, neither is he ***manipulated*** for favour - Just ask the Israelites, "*how did that work out for you to bring the Ark to battle*?" Ask the Philistines, "*who'd like to showcase the bounty of the Ark at their next town fair*?"

The second overwhelming reality is that YHWH is **the God**; There is only one ultimate reality, the cause of all that is (1Cor8:5-6) - and He has revealed of His Own Will, His Name, YHWH - The Self Existent one! "I am who I am"

Isaiah 45:18 *For thus says the LORD, who created the heavens (he is* ***God****!), who formed the earth and made it (he established it; he did not create it empty, he formed it to be inhabited!): "I am the LORD, and there is no other*.

**And they confess, A Description**: *This* ***Holy*** *God.* 34070 Israelites and innumerous Philistines died in His presence. Preacher Luke Walker: "*The sun will burn your eyes out from a distance of 92 million miles and do you expect to casually stroll into the presence of its Maker?*"

The third overwhelming reality is that YHWH, the One True God, is a consuming God (Heb12:28-29), in whose presence **no rebel can withstand - no sinner can stand**: Even the most honorable of sinners, Moses, who spoke to God as a man with a friend, when he pleaded to see God's glory, was told he needed to shelter - Ex32:18 *Moses said, "Please show me your glory."*

19 And he said, "I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name **'The LORD**.' ... 20 But," he said, "you cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live."... , "Behold, there is a place by me where you shall stand on the rock, 22 and while my glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my **hand** until I have passed by. 23 Then I will take away **my hand**, and you shall see my back, but my face shall not be seen."

And if that **hand** is not covering you, then it is against you: v6,7,9,11

6 The hand of the LORD was heavy against the people of Ashdod: ... his hand is hard against us and against Dagon our god.

9 the hand of the LORD was against the city, causing a very great panic... "Send away the ark of the God of Israel, and let it return to its own place, that it may not kill us and our people." For there was a deathly panic throughout the whole city. The hand of God was very heavy there.

Isn't it telling how we clamber to be Recognised, Rewarded, Justified; except before **This, Holy, God**? Even religious people - once trying to get God to serve them - now struck with a question?

Who is able to stand before the LORD, this holy God?   
And to whom shall he go up away from us?

**Perhaps this is the greatest occupation mankind busies itself with** - to keep the True God away! Pre-Occupying our time with other matters, our hands with work, our eyes with entertainment, our stomachs with food - Imagining Him to be different; or a Small thing - but abandoning our souls - the part of us that knows **He is True**. Scrambling to be someone before the world, **Scrambling to be hidden before the LORD, Away from Him! - Is that you?**

***God so loved the world, ... that He sent His Son***... The solution is not for us to send God away - but for God to come to us! See 1 John 4:14-15

we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides [makes home, welcomes] in him, and he in God.

That's the answer to their question! ***Who is able to stand before the LORD, this holy God?*** Jesus Christ - our Saviour! Our High Priest who was "*made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make a sacrifice that satisfied God's wrath, to pay for the sins of the people*."

Don't waste your precious life on vanity and futility! This, Holy, God, has come to us.

Where are you clambering for victory - for your 'Yeah!' - your significance, recognition, belonging, approval, security, joy and hope? Are you clambering **away from** the presence of the LORD? The Victory is **His**! Each of us will choose to clamber ***away from His victory*** and arrive at the same conclusion as the Beth-Shemeshites - "this is futile", or ***toward His victory*** and arrive at the gift of His salvation - finding ourselves Recognised, Rewarded, Justified before Him - **He** is the Victory our souls are yearning for.