

15.06 The Ark Sent Back (1 Samuel 6:1–7:2)

✓ “*Check*” it out; opinion, inference, supposed conversation, or fact one can verify follows
[. . .] indicates a remark to the teacher that usually should not be read. It also indicates answers to questions.

Visuals and Tools:

- Pictures and other visuals found at the end of this lesson. Please give credit to the sources of pictures.
- Check “Activities” and “Handwork” found below for additional materials.

Bible Time Tips and Terms to Teach: Vocabulary words are enlarged for flashcards at the end of this lesson. Print, cut out, and glue to card stock, or just print on colorful cardstock.

- *yoke*: wooden timber that couple two oxen or cows together so that they pull together

Scripture: (ESV)

1 Samuel 6:1 The ark of the LORD was in the country of the Philistines seven months. 2 And the Philistines called for the priests and the diviners and said, “What shall we do with the ark of the LORD? Tell us with what we shall send it to its place.” 3 They said, “If you send away the ark of the God of Israel, do not send it empty, but by all means return him a guilt offering. Then you will be healed, and it will be known to you why his hand does not turn away from you.” 4 And they said, “What is the guilt offering that we shall return to him?” They answered, “Five golden tumors and five golden mice, according to the number of the lords of the Philistines, for the same plague was on all of you and on your lords. 5 So you must make images of your tumors and images of your mice that ravage the land, and give glory to the God of Israel. Perhaps he will lighten his hand from off you and your gods and your land. 6 Why should you harden your hearts as the Egyptians and Pharaoh hardened their hearts? After he had dealt severely with them, did they not send the people away, and they departed? 7 Now then, take and prepare a new cart and two milk cows on which there has never come a yoke, and yoke the cows to the cart, but take their calves home, away from them. 8 And take the ark of the LORD and place it on the cart and put in a box at its side the figures of gold, which you are returning to him as a guilt offering. Then send it off and let it go its way 9 and watch. If it goes up on the way to its own land, to Beth-shemesh, then it is he who has done us this great harm, but if not, then we shall know that it is not his hand that struck us; it happened to us by coincidence.”

10 The men did so, and took two milk cows and yoked them to the cart and shut up their calves at home. 11 And they put the ark of the LORD on the cart and the box with the golden mice and the images of their tumors. 12 And the cows went straight in the direction of Beth-shemesh along one highway, lowing as they went. They turned neither to the right nor to the left, and the lords of the Philistines went after them as far as the border of Beth-shemesh. 13 Now the people of Beth-shemesh were reaping their wheat harvest in the valley. And when they lifted up their eyes and saw the ark, they rejoiced to see it. 14 The cart came into the field of Joshua of Beth-shemesh and stopped there. A great stone was there. And they split up 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 box that was beside it, in which were the golden figures, and set them upon the great stone. And the men of Beth-shemesh offered burnt offerings and sacrificed sacrifices on that day to the LORD. 16 And when the five lords of the Philistines saw it, they returned that day to Ekron.

17 These are the golden tumors that the Philistines returned as a guilt offering to the LORD: one for Ashdod, one for Gaza, one for Ashkelon, one for Gath, one for Ekron, 18 and the golden mice, according to the number of all the cities of the Philistines belonging to the five lords, both fortified cities and unwalled villages. The great stone beside which they set down the ark of the LORD is a witness to this day in the field of Joshua of Beth-shemesh.

19 And he struck some of the men of Beth-shemesh, because they looked upon the ark of the LORD. He struck seventy men of them, and the people mourned because the LORD had struck the people with a great blow. 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?” 21 So they sent messengers to the inhabitants of Kiriath-jearim, saying,

“The Philistines have returned the ark of the LORD. Come down and take it up to you.”

7:1 And the men of Kiriath-jearim came and took up the ark of the LORD and brought it to the house of Abinadab on the hill. And they consecrated his son Eleazar to have charge of the ark of the LORD. 2 From the day that the ark was lodged at Kiriath-jearim, a long time passed, some twenty years, and all the house of Israel lamented after the LORD.

Introduction/Review:

The Philistines, enemies of Israel [locate their territory], had captured the ark of the covenant. When Eli, the priest who had served forty years, heard this sad news, he fell backward off his chair, broke his neck, and died.

Meanwhile, in Philistia the ark was causing catastrophes. The Philistine god, Dagon, fell down before the ark, and his head and hands broke off his image. Two cities, Ashdod and Gath, experienced disease and death while the ark was in their environs. Something had to be done to get rid of that ark!

Story:

How to send the ark back

The ark stayed with the Philistines seven months—like from Easter to Thanksgiving Day. That’s a long time to be plagued with disease and death! The Philistines called their priests and asked, “What shall we do with the ark of God?” How can we send it to its place?”

The priests answered, “Don’t send it back empty, but send a trespass offering.”

“What shall we send for a trespass offering?” asked the people.

The priests answered, “Five (that’s one for each of the five lords of the Philistines and their cities) golden tumors (to remind of the tumors that came with the disease God sent upon us) and five (again, for the five lords of the Philistines) golden mice (to remind of the cause—rats or mice—of destruction). If you do this,” the priests suggested, “maybe the God of Israel will accept the trespass offering and the destruction of us Philistines will stop. Don’t harden your hearts as the Egyptians did when Israel left their land.”

“In addition,” continued the priests, “(1) Make a new cart. (2) Take two milk cows that have never had a yoke on them. Take their calves away from them. (3) Put the ark on the cart and the five golden tumors and five golden rats/mice in a special box. (4) Send the milk cows and the ark away. (5) If the cows take the ark to the next Israelite town, Beth Shemesh, then we’ll know God has brought all this destruction upon us. If the cows don’t take the ark, then we’ll know it was just bad luck.”

The people did as the priests said. What do you think? Would the ark go back to Israel, or would it stay in Ekron? Would those cows leave their hungry babies at home—completely against nature and causing themselves pain?

God made those cows leave their babies. Oh, the cows bellowed about the separation—mooing all the way. Those cows didn’t go into the grain fields for food and didn’t go back to their beloved babies but kept going down the road all the way to Beth Shemesh.

When the ark arrived at Beth Shemesh, people there were working hard, harvesting wheat in the valley. ✓Perhaps one worker caught a glimpse of movement on the road, turned to look, and heard the bawling cows. What was happening? Could it be? Yes! It must be the ark. ✓Maybe he yelled at another worker, “Hey! Isn’t that the ark of God? It certainly is! Wow! Yippee! The ark is back! The ark is back!”

How to respect the ark

Those mama cows kept trudging until they brought the cart with the ark to the place where God wanted it—into the field of a Beth Shemesh man named Joshua (not the same one who conquered Jericho 300 years earlier). In that field was a huge rock. The Levites, the ones God had said should carry the ark, took the ark

off the wooden cart and placed it on the large stone. They also retrieved the smaller box with the five golden tumors and the five golden mice/rats and put them on the stone.

Then the men of Beth Shemesh broke apart the cart, slaughtered the cows, burned the wood, and offered the cows as an offering to God. Happy the ark was back, they offered other sacrifices to God that day.

The five lords of the Philistines, who had sneaked into the land to find out what would happen, saw all of this and went back home to Ekron.

But all was not well in Beth Shemesh. The men of the place were curious. ✓“I wonder what the ark looks like inside,” they might have said.

Oh, oh! The ark was so sacred, so set apart from the people, that only the high priest could see it—and that only once a year. Even he never looked inside it. Only Aaron, the first priest saw the inside when he placed the ten-commandment stones and the pot of manna inside it. Now these men had so little regard for God’s holy ark that they boldly looked into it. (This brazen disregard for the holy by these men reminds me of kids who run and play in the building where God’s people meet to worship.)

God was not pleased with these men who looked into the ark, and He struck 50,070¹ dead. The people mourned, crying because so many had died.

Then, like the cities of Philistia, the people at Beth Shemsh didn’t want the ark. They sent it to the next city on the road, Kirjath-Jearim, and asked those people to take it. This Kirjath-Jearim did, bringing it into the house of a man named Abinadab. Abinadab delegated his son, Eleazar, to care for the ark while it remained at his home.²

¹Some versions read *seventy*, “but as Bethshemesh was but a small place, a village, as Josephus calls it, and it seems not likely that there should be such a number of persons in it, and especially that should look into the ark; or that God, who is good and merciful, should destroy so large a number for this offence, however he might think fit to make an example of some, it is thought that the case was not as our version represents it. Some who think there were so many slain, yet distinguish them, seventy of the elders of the people, and 50,000 of the congregation, or common people. . . . Abarbinel is of opinion that only seventy men of Bethshemesh were slain, and that the other 50,000 were the Philistines that died on account of the ark while it was among them; and reads the words, ‘with the men of Bethshemesh he smote—even he smote of the people seventy’; that is, of the men of Bethshemesh; 50,000, that is, of the Philistines, and so this gives the sum of all that died on account of the ark, both while it was in the hands of the Philistines, and when returned to Bethshemesh, which is not an improbable sense.” More possibilities are discussed at [1 Samuel 6:19 - Meaning and Commentary on Bible Verse \(biblestudytools.com\)](#).


²The ark was not moved until the time of David about 78 years later. First Samuel 7:2 states, “From the day that the ark was lodged at Kiriath-jearim, a long time passed, some twenty years, and all the house of Israel lamented after the LORD.” The following quotation from John Gill explains this difference in number of years: “[N]ot that this was all the time the ark was at Kirjathjearim, but it was so long there before it was much taken notice of, and sought unto, and the Lord by it; there was a great neglect of God, and his worship, which through the means of Samuel began to revive about this time” ([1 Samuel 7:2 - Meaning and Commentary on Bible Verse \(biblestudytools.com\)](#)).

Lessons from this lesson:

- We see Jesus:

“[The ark] had triumphed over the Philistines, and come out of its house of bondage (like Christ out of the grave) by its own power” ([1 Samuel 6 Commentary - Matthew Henry Commentary on the Whole Bible \(Complete\) \(biblestudytools.com\)](#)).

Activities:

- Play dough: cart; cows; calves; large, flat stone
- Snack: Sugar cookies in the shape of carts. Cut 1x3-inch rectangular shapes out of rolled-out cookie dough. Cut the short sides of the rectangle at an angle. With a bottle cap cut circles; cut these circles in half and attach to the bottom of the wagon bed. Cut out more wheel circles and place over the half wheels. Press down a little. Score horizontal lines on the cart, and score spokes on the cart wheels. 
- Review questions: (Game: If using a flannel board, print the numerals found below and back with flannel, flocked paper, or paper towel, or, if using a pocket chart, print on card stock. Cut numerals apart. For each correct answer a student may place a numeral on the bulletin board or in the pocket chart. Why seven numbers? To represent the seven months the ark was in the possession of the Philistines.)
 1. How long was the ark in the land of the Philistines? [Seven months.]
 2. What did the Philistines put with the ark as a guilt offering to Israel's God? [Five golden tumors and five golden mice.]
 3. Why did the Philistines give *five* of each of these things? [To represent the five lords and main cities of the Philistines.]
 4. Why did the Philistines give five tumors? [To represent the disease they had.]
 5. Describe the animals that pulled the cart with the ark of the covenant. [They were milk cows that had never had a yoke.]
 6. How would the Philistines know whether or not it was Israel's God who had caused them much destruction? [If the cows took the cart back to Israel even though they wanted to be with their calves.]
 7. What did the Israelites do with the cart and the cows? [Slaughtered the cows for a sacrifice; used the wood from the cart to make a fire for the sacrifice.]

Memory Verse[s]:

- 1 Samuel 2:30: [God said,] "Those that honor me I will honor, and those that despise me shall be lightly esteemed."

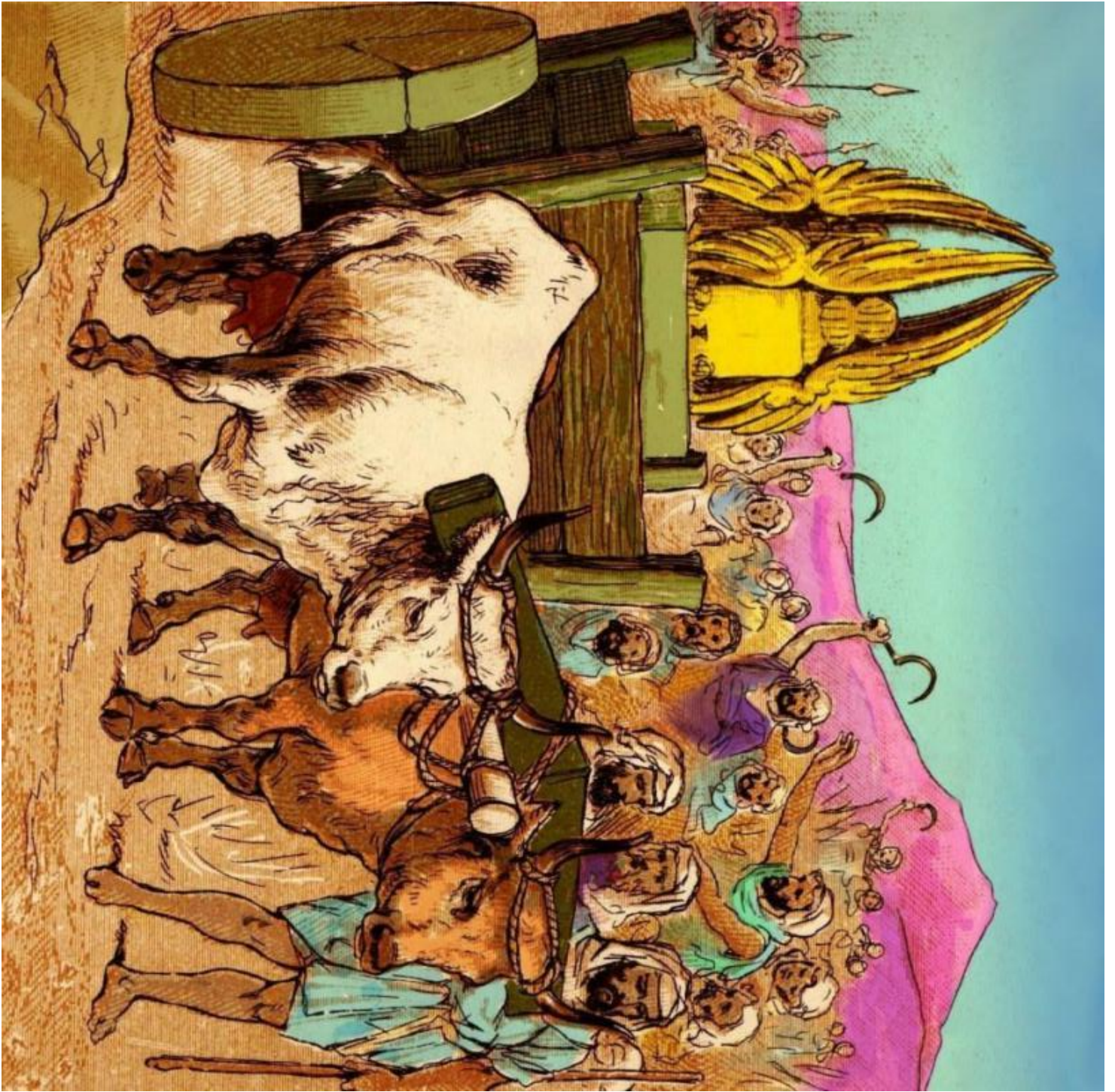
Handwork:

- Make a simple card stock wagon following directions found at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cHz4n4ikeLU>. (Cutting out the around the wheel spokes and including the covered top seem unnecessary and time-consuming.) A template is found below.

yoke



st-takla.org



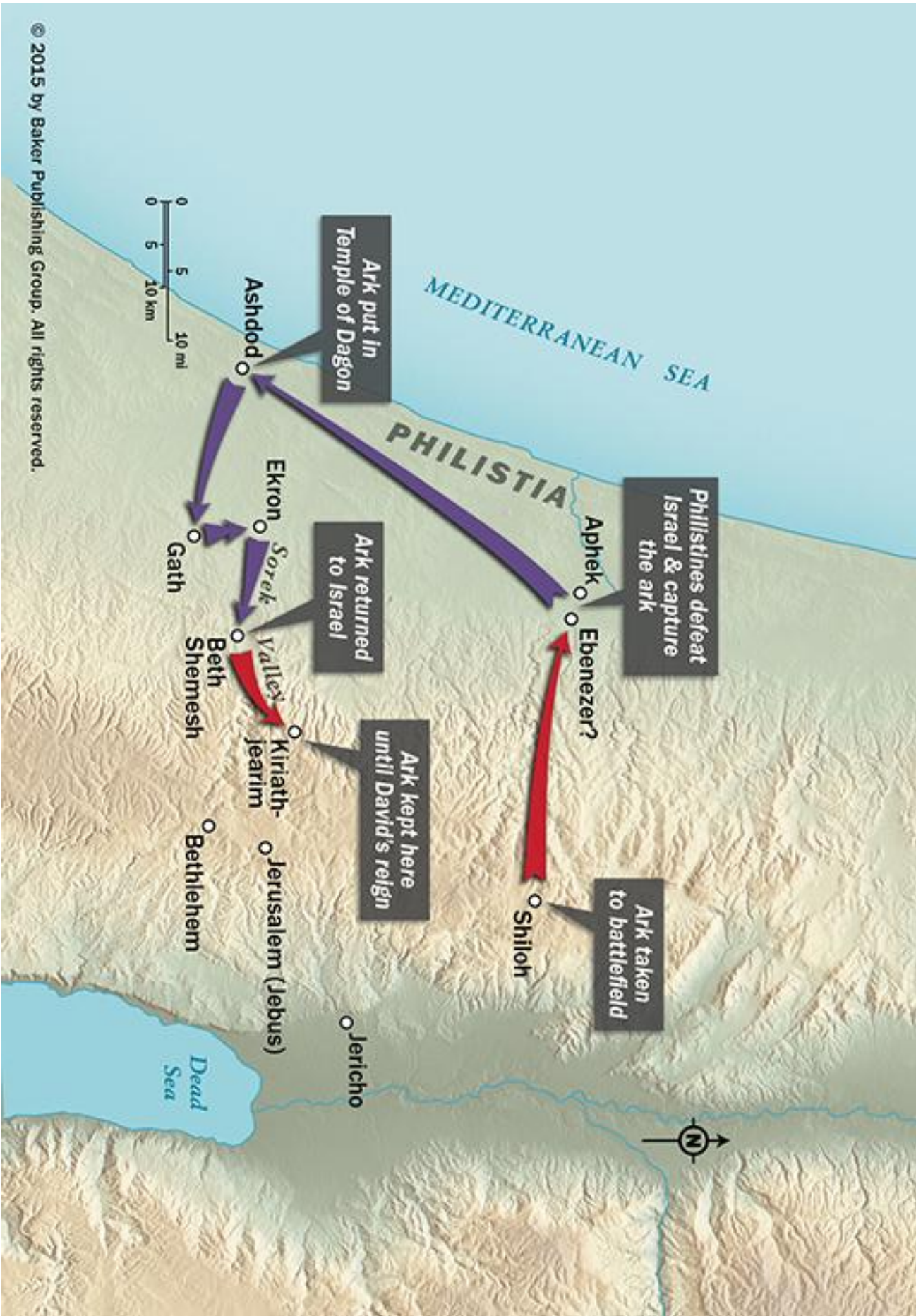
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**NOW THE PEOPLE OF BETH-SHEMESH WERE
REAPING THEIR WHEAT HARVEST IN THE VALLEY.**

**AND WHEN THEY LIFTED UP
THEIR EYES AND SAW THE ARK,
THEY REJOICED TO SEE IT.**

1 SAMUEL 6:13





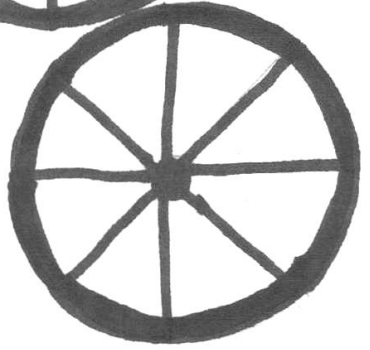
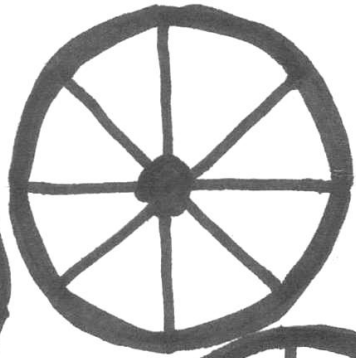
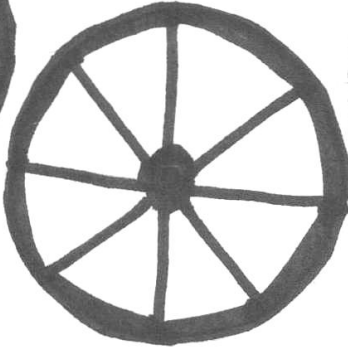
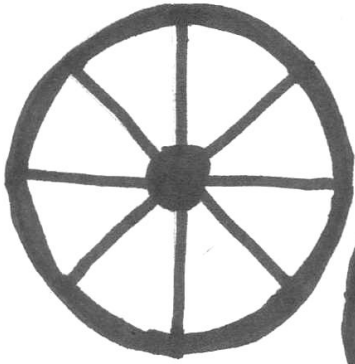
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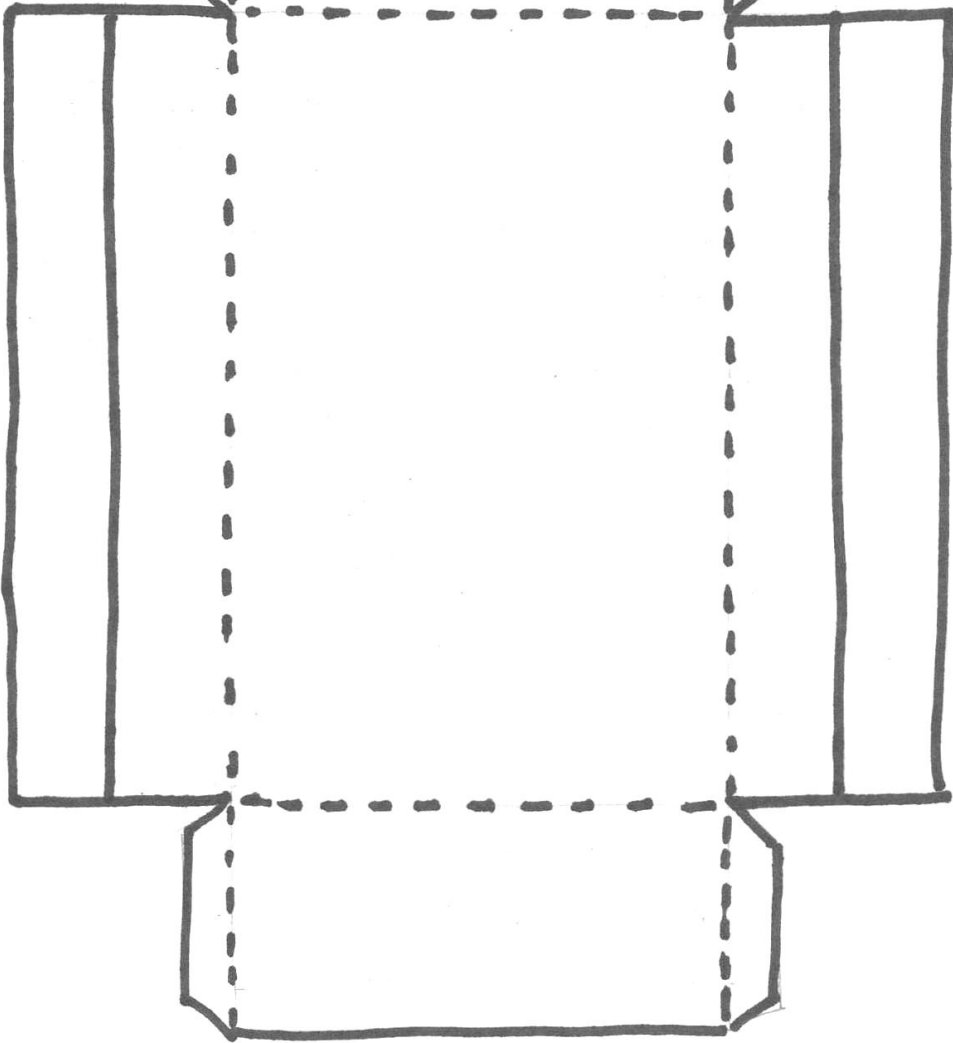
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seat



front



longue

