Different Responses to the Holiness of God:
Faux vs. True Repentance

1 Samuel 6-7

I. Introduction

A. Last time…

1. Ark of the Covenant was brought out to battle by Israel like a magic rabbit's foot or "tame" lion.
2. Philistines capture the Ark and route Israel, but really the Lord was judging them both.

B. The question of chapters 6-7 is: *How do people respond to God who is Holy?* (6:20)

II. Worldly Rejection (6:1-12) – *approaching God based on man's wisdom and goals*

A. The problem of & solutions to God's holy power through worldly eyes (1-6)

1. The Problem the Philistines had (6:1-2)
   a. The world sees suffering as the primary evil rather than a wake-up call to God's holiness.
   b. Having encountered the holy God and suffering for it, they appeal to the "experts" to determine if there is a return policy on the Ark (to get God off their case).
   c. Cp. to Mark 5 when the people determine Jesus's presence is too costly to what they really value and plead with Him to depart.

2. What do the experts of the day suggest? (6:3-6)
   a. They are right that they are guilty before God. But how do they respond to that guilt?
   b. Note what they are concerned with? Is it knowing God? (see v. 5)

B. The double-mindedness of worldly fear of God (7-12)

1. Despite all they've seen in terms of God's judging hand, they still think it could be a coincidence.
   a. It is a "test" of God and not repentance. This is the world's way of thinking.
   b. It is worth noting that the atheists of our day are not any different in a sense.
      (i) They have their own experts working, *abusing* the tool of science by transforming it into a form of divination – answering questions the tools of science cannot answer with "authority."
      (ii) But it is all in service to the idolatrous desires of the day and the desire to get God's heavy hand off what is most valued.

2. How do the Philistines respond to God in his holiness?
   Now what will they do with that revelation? Should they not turn and at least begin to serve or fear this obviously real and living God? Or will they go back to Ashdod and take Dagon to the local image shop for repairs? Maybe they will lobby the five lords to fund the research and development of rat and mice pesticides. Some of the elite may slap "Survivor of the Plague of 1070" bumper stickers on their chariots. Perhaps the majority simply sighed, "Glad that's over!" It is so easy for us sinners—Philistine or otherwise—to respond only to the pain and not to the truth of a situation. Our immediate fears are alleviated but our heads are no wiser, our hearts no softer.[1]

[1] Dale Ralph Davis, *1 Samuel: Looking on the Heart*, Focus on the Bible Commentary (Scotland: Christian Focus Pub., 2000), 64.

III. Religious Rejection (6:13-7:1) – *Man's wisdom with a veneer of religious activity*

A. Happy with the idea of God's presence but blind to God's holiness (13-18)

1. Beth-shemesh was a Levitical city, specifically of the Kohathites (Josh. 21).
2. The issue: They took the ark and "set it upon the great stone" (v. 15, cf. Num. 4:4-5)

B. Struck down and terrified for treating God's majesty lightly, they banish the holy God they claim to worship (6:19-21)

1. The Lord strikes a great blow. Why? They ignored God's holiness (Num. 4:18-20).
2. Religion that does not have its heart on God's holiness can never bring us close to God.
3. When God's holiness breaks out against their disobedience, they rightly ask, *"Who is able to stand before the Lord, this holy God?"* (6:20a).
4. But they go on to show their religious response was just as bad as the Canaanites: *"And to whom shall he go up away from us?"* (6:20b).
    (i) A tame god is fine – one can still live by his own feelings and inclinations.
    (ii) A holy God is terrifying and dangerous to sinners….unless they repent.

IV. Heartfelt Repentance (7:2-12) – *genuine, whole-hearted turning to God*

A. Samuel's ministry – 20 years of calling for repentance (1 Sam. 7:2-6)

B. What is genuine repentance? (3-6)

1. **First, it is God-focused (6)**
    a. It is not just sorrow or general feelings of regret but actual repentance towards God
    b. People are often sorry for consequences, but true repentance recognizes the problem is having sinned against the holy God.
2. **Second, it is turning away from sin and idolatry (3b-4a)**
    a. True repentance sees that all that was empty and leading to death.
    b. So, it turns away from idols and sin that separate from the holy God.
3. **Third, true repentance is whole-hearted devotion/turning to the LORD (3, 6)**
    a. True repentance meets the Lord's demand for wholehearted obedience with joyful action.
    b. It makes us ready to do whatever it takes to obey him.
4. **Fourth, it is putting on obedience to the Lord (3)**
    a. Serving him only.
    b. Living in a way that says, "I want to please God"

C. The repentant keep trusting God in difficulty (1 Sam 7:7-11)

1. Even when we seek the LORD, difficulty will come, and our confidence in God will be tested.
2. Note how different this encounter is than ch. 4. God is not treated as a trained attack dog.
3. The outcome is vastly different. The Lord thundered (cp. with 1 Sam 2:10)
4. Repentance and faith = two sides of one coin. To repent requires trusting God.

D. The faithful response to the Lord's faithfulness (12)

1. While we may not erect national monuments as we see the Lord's faithful care in our lives, we should at least remind ourselves of them
2. The faithful remain faithful by remembering the Lord's faithfulness

V. Samuel, the Prophet, Priest, and Judge of Israel (7:13-17)