

“Merman!”

I. **INTRO:**

- A. **Memorial Day**/John Uriarte/**Operation Military Assistance** [present flag 2nd service]
1. **OMA:** Prays; Connects w/families; [pre-deployment; deployment; post-deployment]
 2. As this day commemorates all U.S. Men/women who died while in the military service. **1,000th American serviceman killed in the Afghan conflict.**
- B. **All church Fast for marriages** - choose a day this week. (Is.58)
- C. Prayer for **Bulgaria** team(Keith, Cheri, Candy, Johnnie-Anne). And Mical **India**.
- D. **Intro Story:** In *The Chronicles of Narnia*, 2 girls, **Susan** and **Lucy**, are getting ready to meet **Aslan** the lion, who represents Christ. 2 talking animals, Mr. and Mrs. Beaver, prepare the children for the encounter. “Ooh,” said Susan, “I thought he was a man. Is he quite safe? I shall feel rather nervous about meeting a lion.” “That you will, dearie,” said Mrs. Beaver. “And make no mistake, if there’s anyone who can appear before Aslan without their knees knocking, they’re either braver than most or else just silly.” “Then isn’t he safe?” said Lucy. “Safe?” said Mr. Beaver. “Don’t you hear what Mrs. Beaver tells you? Who said anything about safe? Of course he isn’t safe. But he’s **good**. He’s the king, I tell you!”

II. **THE ARK IN A STRANGE LAND! (5:1-12)**

- A. **THE ARK IN ASHDOD!** (1-8)
- B. (1) **Ashdod** - 1 of their pentapolis. (see all 5 in 6:17)
1. On the coastal plain, about 5m from the Med sea.
- C. (2) The Ashdodites were devotees of **Dagon** (*little fish* ½ man, ½ fish).
1. **Dagon:** body of a fish(*dag*/Heb.) & head/hands of a man. **A Merman!**
 - a) He was a very popular deity throughout the Mesopotamian world.
 2. **The ark was set up in Dagon’s Temple.** Dagon appears to have been on a raised platform & the ark placed “on the side” & “beneath” it.
 - a) A position symbolic of *an inferior* “waiting on” & “ready to serve” a superior.¹

¹ Cyril Barber; The books of Samuel; pg.72

- D. (3-4) Unwilling to accept this incident an *evil omen*, the priests hastily restored Dagon to his position of eminence.
1. They hurry the next morn to check it. But Dagon was again found prostrate before the ark, & this time *severely damaged*.
 2. Don't miss lying face down on the ground in a position of **worship** before the ark! This time decapitated & dismembered [Head/arms symbols of his wisdom/activity]
- E. These pagan priests were confronted with a **theological problem**. Is this other God greater than theirs? Naaa, let's just develop a new tradition instead (see vs.5).
- F. (5) Zeph.1:9 mentions a custom of *leaping the threshold*, & this story gives the tradition of this custom. [Kind of a step on a crack break your mothers back]
1. In the same day I will punish All those who leap over the threshold, Who fill their masters' houses with violence and deceit. Zeph.1:9
- G. (6) **Tumor** - mound, boil.
1. In the Greek **LXX**(3rd to 2nd cent BC) & Latin **Vulgate**(5th cent/Jerome) both add “& in the midst of their land rats sprang up, & there was a great death panic in the city”
- H. 3 Hebrew words help us:
1. **Opel** [tumor] [עִפְּלָה *ophel*] (5:6) “boil/swellings”(usually in the groin).
 2. **Tehor** [tumor] [טְחוּרִים *tâchor*] (6:11,17) “painful swelling”.
 3. **Satar** [broke out] [שָׂתַר *sathar*] (5:9) only used here. “to be hidden, to be inverted.”
 - a) The swellings occurred “in their secret parts”, a reference to the groin, and was contagious, killing many. The disease was associated with the presence of **rats**. Add **rats + disease** then the entire episode is consistent with the disease known as *bubonic plague*. In bubonic plague, the **fleas** of the rat are able to transmit to humans the pathologic bacteria, *Yersinia pestis*. The bacteria invade the human body, causing fever and buboes, which are large soft swellings in the armpit and groin. Without treatment, the mortality rate is 60 to 90 percent. Baker Encyclopedia
- I. The glory may have departed from Israel, but God was still in control & well able to defend His name.
1. Has the enemy captured the glory from your life? Rest assured God is still on the throne!
- J. God can reveal Himself in a heathen temple, & all false gods must fall before Him.
1. How much better it would have been for His glory to be revealed on the **battlefield**, but He could not give victory to a disobedient people.
 - a) It would only have encouraged them more in their sin. [Warren Wiersbe]

- K. (8) Their panic parallels the hysteria spread by the *Black Death* in Europe in 1348 & by the *plague* in London in 1665.
- L. **This reminds me of a story** - In 1715 King Louis XIV of France died after a reign of 72 years. He had called himself “**the Great,**” and was the monarch who made the famous statement, “**I am the state!**” His court was the most magnificent in Europe, and his funeral was equally spectacular. As his body lay in state in a golden coffin, orders were given that the cathedral should be very dimly lit with only a special candle set above his coffin, to dramatize his greatness. At the memorial, thousands waited in hushed silence. Then Bishop Massillon began to speak; slowly reaching down, he snuffed out the candle and said, “**Only God is great.**”
- M. **THE ARK IN GATH!** (9)
- N. **Sounds like “Hot potato!”** - The object of hot potato is to not be the one holding the potato when the music stops. [Gath passes the hot potato to Ekron]
- O. **THE ARK IN EKRON!** (10-12)
- P. Instead of confessing their sin & trusting the true God of Israel, the people of Philistia tried to get rid of the ark.
1. What a great opportunity they were passing by!
 2. But then, would you want to trust in the god of the **defeated** enemy?

III. **THE RETURN OF THE ARK! (6:1-21)**

- A. **PRIESTS & DIVINERS!** (1-6)
- B. **Priests & diviners** - There were 3 primary modes of divination practiced throughout the ancient Near East.
1. **Divination by arrows** - arrow shot into air, & an omen was taken from the direction it fell.
 2. **Divination by teraphim** - these images were supposed to speak & give oracular responses to those who consulted them. [of course depending on the devotees rt standing w/the god or goddess]
 3. **Divination by sacrifice** - the entrails(guts) & liver of a sacrificial animal were examined to help the priest determine the will of the gods.
- C. **After 7 months of trouble, the desperate Philistines are advised by their own priests to send the ark back to Israel w/a guilt offering.**

D. **GOD OR COINCIDENCE?** (7-12)

E. **Mad-cow Test 101**: 2 cows, that have just given birth to calves, & that have never been yoked before, are tied to a cart holding the ark.

1. If the cows would leave their calves & head straight with no leading by its owner.

a) Oh, & the cows protest their separation from their calves (*lowing as they went*), nevertheless pull the driverless cart all the way from Ekron to Beth-Shemesh.

2. *If the ark heads straight to Israel...they'll know it's God.*

3. *If the ark doesn't cross the border...they'll know it's chance.*

F. **REJOICING AT THE RETURN!** (13-18)

G. **Beth Shemesh** - *house of the sun*. [a *sacerdotal* city (i.e. Relating to priests)] A **Levitical city**

1. **Wheat harvest** - late May early June.

H. They stopped close to a **large stone**-The **rock** became an altar; the **cart** became firewood; the **cows** became the burnt offering; & the **Levites** lead the people in an act of consecration & worship.

I. Then, Levites missed *one thing*...Numb.4:5,19,20 **When the camp prepares to journey, Aaron and his sons shall come, and they shall take down the covering veil and cover the ark of the Testimony with it.** 19 but do this in regard to them, that they may live and not die when they approach the most holy things: Aaron and his sons shall go in and appoint each of them to his service and his task. 20 But they shall not go in to watch while the holy things are being covered, **lest they die.**

J. **TRAGEDY!** (19-21)

K. The "*house of the sun*" just went dark.

L. (19) Hebrew wording? - *he struck 70 men of the people & 50 oxen of a man.*

M. God **chastened** the Philistines because they **kept** the ark, **but** He **killed** some of His own people because they **looked into** the ark.

1. **Why ?** The Israelites knew the law & therefore were more responsible than the Philistines.

a) Besides, no earthly king would have permitted unauthorized persons to casually **touch his throne** - ho much more so God! This was a thoughtless disrespect for God. [Q: **Are we doing anything to disrespect God in our lives?**]

2. As the Lord vindicated His **honor** among the Philistines, He was now compelled to vindicate His **holiness** in the midst of His own people.

- N. (20) **Their reaction?** - Instead of repenting of their sin, they blame God for their misfortune & sought for a means whereby they could quickly be rid of Him. :(
1. Sounds like the story of what happened to **Jesus** when he cast the demons out of the 2 demoniacs Mt.8:34 **And behold, the whole city came out to meet Jesus. And when they saw Him, they begged Him to depart from their region.**
- O. (7:1) **Abinadab's** house became a tabernacle of the Lord.
1. He & his house didn't fear the **plague**, or the **judgment** of God, **but welcomed** the ark into his house.
 - a) Then consecrates his son to the service of the ark. (prob his oldest; i.e. His heir, thus the 1 most important to him)
 - b) By this he shows his **deep & abiding respect** for the Lord, & a **willingness** to give Him **top priority!**
 - (1) He demonstrated the condition of his **heart**, by honoring God over **material or familial** concerns.
 2. **Q:** Shouldn't every home be a holy dwelling-place for Him?
 3. **Q:** Has God been brought into your home to reside? [into your hearts home 1st?]
- P. **“Safe?”** **“Who said anything about safe? Of course he isn't safe. But he's good. He's the king, I tell you!”**
- Q. Family Camp Promo: **Show Promo & Read.**