

CHAPTER 6

INTRODUCTION TO FIRST SAMUEL 6

In this chapter we are told the Philistines advised with their priests what to do with the ark, and wherewith to send it home, (^{<0001>}1 Samuel 6:1,2) whose advice was to send with it a trespass offering, golden images of emerods and mice, and to put it on a new cart, and the images in a coffer on the side of the ark, and draw it with two cows, (^{<0003>}1 Samuel 6:3-8), and gave them a token whereby they might know whether they had been smitten by the God of Israel or not, (^{<0009>}1 Samuel 6:9) which advice they took, and acted in all things according to it; and the lords of the Philistines accompanied the ark to the border of Bethshemesh, (^{<0010>}1 Samuel 6:10-12), where they of Bethshemesh received it with joy, and offered the kine for a burnt offering to the Lord, and the Levites took care of the ark and presents in it, and the lords of the Philistines returned home, (^{<0013>}1 Samuel 6:13-18), but they of Bethshemesh looking into the ark were smitten of God, upon which they sent to the men of Kirjathjearim to fetch it from them, (^{<0019>}1 Samuel 6:19-21).

Ver. 1. *And the ark of the Lord was in the country of the Philistines seven months.*] Or “in the field”^{f108} of the Philistines; hence Procopius Gazaicus observes, that none of the cities daring to receive the ark, they left it without under the open air, so thinking they should be delivered from their calamity. But the word is often used for country, and is generally so understood here; the Targum is,

“in the cities of the Philistines;”

in one or other of them, first for a while in Ashdod, and then for some time in Gath, and last in Ekron, and in all seven months from the time of its being taken; and it being in wheat harvest when it was returned, (^{<0013>}1 Samuel 6:13), these seven months will carry us back to the beginning of winter, or towards the end of autumn, when the battles between Israel and the Philistines were fought, and the ark was taken. Josephus^{f109} says it was with the Philistines four months only, contrary to the text.

Ver. 2. *And the Philistines called for the priests and for the diviners,* etc.] The one were skilled in the rites and ceremonies of religion, not only of their own, but of other nations, particularly of Israel; and that they were not strangers to the history and affairs of that people is plain from (~~1016~~ 1 Samuel 6:6) and the other were skilled in judicial astrology, and knowledge of future events, at least as they pretended to; and therefore were both thought fit persons to advise with on the occasion of the ark, and the circumstances they were in through that:

saying, what shall we do to the ark of the Lord? shall we send it back to its own land, or not? the Ekronites had moved it might be sent back, and the five lords sent for the priests and diviners to have their advice upon it, whether it was right or not, and what they should do to it, or with it; for if it was advisable to send it back, then another question follows:

tell us wherewith we shall send it to its place; whether on men's shoulders, or on horses or asses, or on a carriage; and whether just as it was taken, or with some presents with it.

Ver. 3. *And they said, if ye send away the ark of the God of Israel, send it not empty,* etc.] As they perceived they had either resolved upon, or at least were inclined to do; and which they also thought advisable and therefore would have them by no means send it away as it was, but with some presents along with it; for the meaning of this word "empty" is not that they should take care that all that were in it when taken should go with it, and nothing be taken out of it, or it be stripped of its contents; but that some gifts and offerings should be sent along with it: perhaps they might have some notion of, or respect unto a law in Israel, (~~1023~~ Exodus 23:15) or might say this from a common principle received among Heathens, that deities were to be appeased by gifts ^{f110}:

but in any wise return him a trespass offering; here again they seem to have some notion of the sorts and kinds of sacrifice among the Israelites; and advise to a trespass offering, to make satisfaction and atonement for the offence they had committed in taking away the ark; and that they should make restoration not only by returning the ark, but by sending an expiatory offering along with it:

then ye shall be healed; of the disease with which they were smitten; for it seems it still continued on them, at least on many:

and it shall be known to you why his hand is not removed from you; which was because the ark was detained by them; but when that should be sent home, and they be healed upon it, then it would be a plain case that the reason why the disease was inflicted and continued was because of that.

Ver. 4. *Then said they, what shall be the trespass offering which we shall return to him?* etc.] They paid a great deference to their priests and diviners, and were willing to be directed in all things by them; being ignorant of what was most proper in this case, and might be acceptable to the God of Israel:

they answered, five golden emerods, and five golden mice; images of these made of gold, as appears from the next verse; the reason of the former is easy, from the above account of the disease they were afflicted with; but of the latter no hint is given before: indeed in the Vulgate Latin and Septuagint versions of (^{49RB}1 Samuel 5:6) is inserted a clause, that

“mice sprung up in the midst of their country;”

which is not in the Hebrew text, nor in the Chaldee paraphrase; yet appears to be a fact from the following verse, that at the same time their bodies were smitten with emerods, their fields were overrun with mice, which destroyed the increase of them; wherefore five golden mice were also ordered as a part of the trespass offering, and five of each were pitched upon:

according to the number of the lords of the Philistines; who were five, and so the principalities under them; (see ^{68BB}Joshua 13:3)

for one plague was on you all, and on your lords; the lords and common people were equally smitten with the emerods, and the several principalities were alike distressed and destroyed with the mice; and therefore the trespass offering, which was a vicarious one for them, was to be according to the number of their princes and their principalities; five emerods for the five princes and their people smitten with emerods, and five mice on account of the five cities and fields adjacent being marred by mice.

Ver. 5. *Wherefore ye shall make images of your emerods,* etc.] Which some take to be images of the five cities; others of a man at large with the disease in his back parts; others of that part of the body of a man only, in a circular form, in which the disease was, and expressing that; but the text is plain for the disease only, as high large tumours: though Maimonides ^{f111}

says of these images, that the word is attributed to them, not because of their external form, but because of their spiritual virtue and influence; whereby the damage or disease of the emerods in the hinder parts were removed: he seems to take them to be a sort of talismans, which were images of a disease or noxious creature a country was infected with, made under some celestial influence to remove it; and Tavernier^{f112} relates, as Bishop Patrick observes, that it is a practice with the Indians to this day, that when any pilgrim goes to a pagoda for the cure of any disease, he brings the figure of the member affected, made either of gold, silver, or copper, according to his quality, which he offers to his god. There is a tradition among the Heathens, which seems to be borrowed from this history, and serves to establish the credit of it; the Athenians not receiving Bacchus and his rites with due honour, he was angry with them, and smote them with a disease in their private parts, which was incurable; on which they consulted the oracle, which advised them in order to be rid of the disease to receive the god with all honour and respect; which order the Athenians obeyed, and made images of the several parts, privately and publicly, and with these honoured the god in memory of the disease^{f113}: both the disease and cure are here plainly pointed at:

and images of your mice that mar the land; that devoured the fruits of it, as these creatures in many instances have been known to do; and particularly in Palestine, the country of the Philistines, where in some places their fields were sometimes almost deserted because of the abundance of them; and were it not for a sort of birds that devoured them, the inhabitants could not sow their seed^{f114}: the Boeotians sacrificed to Apollo Pornopion (which signifies a mouse), to save their country from them^{f115}; Aristotle^{f116} reports of field mice, that they sometimes increase to such incredible numbers, that scarce any of the corn of the field is left by them; and so soon consumed, that some husbandmen, having appointed their labourers to cut down their corn on one day, coming to it the next day, in order to cut it down, have found it all consumed; Pliny^{f117} speaks of field mice destroying the harvest; Aelianus^{f118} relates such an incursion of field mice into some parts of Italy, as obliged the inhabitants to leave the country, and which destroyed the corn fields and plants, as if they had been consumed by heat or cold, or any unseasonable weather; and not only seeds were gnawn, but roots cut up; so the Abderites^{f119} were obliged to leave their country because of mice and frogs:

and ye shall give glory to the God of Israel; by sending these images as monuments of their shameful and painful disease, and of the ruin of their fields; owning that it was the hand of the Lord that smote their bodies with emerods, and filled their fields with mice which devoured them; seeking and asking pardoning of him by the trespass offering they sent him:

peradventure he will lighten his hand from you: abate the violence of the disease, and at length entirely remove it:

and from your gods; not Dagon only, but others seem to have suffered, wherever the ark came: for the Philistines had other deities; besides Dagon at Ashdod, there were Baalzebub at Ekron, and Marnas at Gaza, and Derceto at Ashkelon; and perhaps another at Gath, though unknown; and besides the gods suffered, or however their priests, by the number of men that died, and by the fruits of the earth being destroyed; which must in course lessen their revenues: and from off your land; the fruits of which were destroyed by mice.

Ver. 6. *Wherefore then do ye harden your hearts, as the Egyptians and Pharaoh hardened their hearts?* etc.] And would not let Israel go, when their dismissal was demanded by Moses and Aaron in the name of the Lord; but was refused from time to time, being given up to judicial blindness and hardness of heart: and it seems by this, that though it was proposed by some to send back the ark, and which the priests and diviners approved of; yet there were some that were against it, who, notwithstanding the plagues inflicted on them, like Pharaoh and the Egyptians hardened their hearts; which story these priests were acquainted with by the tradition of their ancestors, this being a fact then generally known in the world; or by the relation of the Israelites, over whom they had ruled many years, and were conversant with them:

when he had wrought wonderfully among them: that is, the God of Israel, though they mention not his name, who had wrought wonders in the land of Egypt; the ten plagues he inflicted on them are referred to:

did they not let the people go, and they departed? who were convinced by these plagues that they ought to let Israel go, and by them were prevailed upon to dismiss them, and the people did go out of their land; and therefore should not we let the ark go likewise, on whom plagues have been inflicted for detaining it? and may we not expect more and greater, should we refuse to dismiss it?

Ver. 7. *Now therefore make a new cart*, etc.] For there were no Levites, nor priests of the Lord to carry it upon their shoulders, as it was wont to be when carried, and therefore they ordered a cart to be made; and they might know the Levites were allowed wagons to carry some of their sacred things on, (^{<000>}Numbers 7:1-8) and a new one for the honour of the ark, as David afterwards did, (^{<000>}2 Samuel 6:3)

and take two milch kine, on which there hath come no yoke; which also might be designed for the honour of the ark; but there was a further view in it, at least in the providence of God; since two such creatures, who had young, would be apt, if left to themselves, as these were, to return home to them, and not to proceed on a journey; and being unaccustomed to a yoke, would draw one way, and another another, in different ways; and not go on in a direct road, as such that are used to the yoke do:

and tie the kine to the cart; in order to draw it:

and bring their calves home from them; that they might not cry after them, which would cause them to turn back.

Ver. 8. *And take the ark of the Lord, and lay it upon the cart*, etc.] Which was dispensed with in these uncircumcised Philistines, there being no other to do this service:

and put the jewels of gold; or rather “vessels of gold”^{f120}; the five golden emerods, and the five golden mice:

which ye return him for a trespass offering, in a coffer by the side thereof; in a basket, as the Syriac version: in a scrip, as the Arabic; in a purse, or bag, as Josephus^{f121}; which latter is probable enough:

and send it away, that it may go; that is, set it a going, without any driver or guide; but leave it to take its course of itself to the land of Israel. Josephus^{f122} says it was set in a place where three ways met, that it might take which it might; and the taking of the right way must be a strong evidence of its being under the direction of God.

Ver. 9. *And see if it goeth up by the way of its own coast to Bethshemesh*, etc.] The nearest city to the land of the Philistines, which lay on their borders, and the borders of the tribe of Judah, (see Gill on “^{<0650>}Joshua 15:10”). Now the lords of the Philistines are directed by their priests to observe, whether these kine, that drew the cart on which the ark was, took

the direct road to the borders of the land of Israel, and to Bethshemesh, the nearest city that lay on that coast: if so, they might conclude then,

he hath done us this great evil; that is, the God of Israel, whose ark this was; he had inflicted the disease of the emerods on them, and sent such numbers of mice into their fields, that had destroyed the increase of them:

but if not, then we shall know that it is not his hand that hath smote us; but that there is some other cause of it:

it was a chance that happened to us; and so might have been the case if the ark had never been taken or detained, and to be imputed to fate, or to the stars, or some secret causes they know not of.

Ver. 10. *And the men did so*, etc.] Made a new cart, not the lords of the Philistines, but workmen by their orders:

and took two milch kine, and tied them to the cart; with the gear that horses, asses, or oxen, were usually fastened to a carriage they drew:

and shut up their calves at home; or, “in the house”^{f123}; the cow house or stable where they used to be put; this they did to restrain them from following the cows, which would disturb them in drawing the cart.

Ver. 11. *And they laid the ark of the Lord upon the cart*, etc.] Perhaps the same men that made the cart; however they were the Philistines, yet were not punished for touching it, as Uzzah was, though an Israelite, (^{am6}2 Samuel 6:6,7)

and the coffer with the mice of gold, and the images of their emerods; which coffer was placed in a purse or bag hung at the side of the ark, with the golden mice and emerods in it.

Ver. 12. *And the kine took the straight way to the way of Bethshemesh*, etc.] Though they had none to drive, lead, or guide them, yet they steered their course to the road that led to Bethshemesh, though there were other ways they might have taken; which shows they were under the direction of God himself:

and went along the highway; or, “in one highway”, or “post”^{f124}; though they had never been used to a yoke, they drew together in one path; and did not draw one way, and another another, as oxen unaccustomed to a yoke do:

lowing as they went; on account of their calves, which showed their sense of them, and their natural affection for them; and yet went on, did not attempt to go back to them; by which it was plain they were under a supernatural influence:

and turned not aside to the right or to the left; when other ways presented, on the right hand or on the left; they kept going straight on in the road that led to the place they were destined for; all which can be reckoned nothing less than a miracle:

and the lords of the Philistines went after them unto the border of Bethshemesh; not before them to guide them, or on the side of the ark to take care of it, but behind: and not at all out of respect and reverence to it, but to see what would be the issue of things, whether it would turn out an imposture or not; and that they might be able to make a true judgment of what had befallen them, as their priests and diviners had directed them to; they followed it until it was out of their territories, and in the hands of the Israelites. This place Bethshemesh is thought by some, as R. Isaiah observes, to be the same with Timnathheres, where Joshua was buried, in (~~11~~Judges 2:9), which signifies the figure of the sun, as this does the house of the sun; and where, perhaps, when inhabited by the Canaanites, was a temple of the sun; and it was, according to Bunting^{f125}, twelve miles from Ekron, from whence the ark came; and so far it was followed by the Philistines. This was a city given to the Levites, and so a proper place for the ark to come to be taken care of; hence mention is made of Levites that took it down from the cart, (~~15~~1 Samuel 6:15), (see Gill on "~~16~~Joshua 21:16").

Ver. 13. *And they of Bethshemesh were reaping their wheat harvest in the valley*, etc.] Which began at Pentecost, in the month Sivan, about our May; so that there were many people in the fields, who were eyewitnesses of this wonderful event:

and they lifted up their eyes, and saw the ark, and rejoiced to see it; for though the ark while in the tabernacle was only seen by the high priest, when he went into the holy of holies; yet this having been brought out from thence, and exposed in the camp of Israel, some of this place very probably were there at that time, and had seen it, and knew it again by its form and splendour; and which gave them great pleasure to behold, which had been taken, and had been so long in the hand of the enemy, and the people of Israel deprived of it; which was the symbol of the divine Presence among

them, and now restored to them again; and in this wonderful way, without seeking for it, without going to war on account of it, without paying a ransom for it; and was brought to them in a cart drawn by cattle without a driver, the lords of the Philistines with a large retinue following it. This is to be understood not of their looking “into” it, as they afterwards did, and were punished, as Kimchi; but of their looking “on” it.

Ver. 14. *And the cart came into the field of Joshua, a Bethshemite,* etc.] In that part of the valley where they were reaping wheat which belonged to him, whom we nowhere else read; whether a priest or Levite, which is not improbable, since this was a city of the Levites, or a common Israelite, is not certain:

and stood there where there was a great stone; afterwards called the great stone of Abel, (^{GENESIS}1 Samuel 6:18). By the providence of God it was so ordered, that the kine made a stop just at this place; and proceeded no further, as if sensible they were come to their journey’s end, and had brought the ark into the hands of its friends, and to a proper place for them to express their thankfulness for it; for this stone seemed designed to be, as it was, the altar on which the burnt offering, by way of thanksgiving for the return of the ark, was to be offered; the Jews say ^{f126} this stone was the altar built by Abraham:

and they clave the wood of the cart, and offered the kine a burnt offering unto the Lord; the cart they cut in pieces, and laid the wood of it in order upon the stone, and slew the two cows, and laid their pieces on the wood, and set fire to it, and burnt them with it, as expressive of joy and thankfulness that the ark was returned. This was done, not by the lords of the Philistines, as some of the ancient Jews thought, as Kimchi relates, in which they are followed by some Christian interpreters; but by the men of Bethshemesh, as Kimchi, by the priests there; for though this was not the proper and usual place for sacrifice, nor were cows offered in sacrifice; yet this being an extraordinary case, and thank offerings were necessary as soon as the ark was returned, these things were dispensed with; and the rather, since Shiloh, where the tabernacle was, was destroyed; and besides, the ark of the Lord was here present, which sanctified the place, as it did the tabernacle, and made it fit for such service; and as for these cows, they had been employed in sacred service, and the Lord had a right unto them, and claim upon them; and it seemed not fitting that they should be after employed to any other use and service than his own; nor were the men of

Bethshemesh blamed or punished for this, though they afterwards were for looking into the ark.

Ver. 15. *And the Levites took down the ark of the Lord*, etc.] Or, “had took it down” ^{f127}; for this, though here related, was done as soon as the ark came into the field, or quickly after, and before the burnt offering could be made, which was burnt with the wood of the cart; and though the persons that took it down are called Levites, they were priests, who were of the tribe of Levi; for it was the work of the priests to take it down, though the Levites then might carry it; and it is remarkable that Bethshemesh was given to the Kohathite Levites, whose business it was to carry the ark on their shoulders; see (~~f210~~) Joshua 21:10 (~~f045~~) Numbers 4:15)

and the coffer that was with it, wherein the jewels of gold were; the purse or bag in which were the five golden mice, and the five golden emerods:

and put them on the great stone; both the ark and the coffer, by which the cart stood, and on which the sacrifice of burnt offering was probably offered:

and the men of Bethshemesh offered burnt offerings, and sacrificed sacrifices, the same day unto the Lord; besides the burnt offering of the two cows, they offered others to testify their thankfulness for the return of the ark; and also peace offerings, on which they feasted with one another, to express their greater joy.

Ver. 16. *And when the five lords of the Philistines had seen it*, etc.] Observed all that was done, how the kine performed their journey, drew the cart in which the ark was straight to Bethshemesh, stopped in a field near it, where it was received joyfully by the people, and sacrifices offered on account of it:

they returned to Ekron the same day; as they might very well, since it was but twelve miles from Bethshemesh.

Ver. 17. *And these are the golden emerods, which the Philistines returned for a trespass offering unto the Lord*, etc.] Along with the ark:

for Ashdod one, for Gaza one, for Ashkelon, one, for Gath one, for Ekron one; which were the five principalities of the Philistines that belonged to the five lords before mentioned; and each of these were at the expense of a

golden emerald, and sent it along with the ark to make atonement for the offence they had been guilty of in taking and detaining it.

Ver. 18. *And the golden mice, according to the number of all the cities of the Philistines belonging to the five lords*, etc.] That is, as many golden mice as there were cities under the jurisdiction of the five lords, which are the same before mentioned:

both of fenced cities and of country villages; walled and unwalled towns; it seems by this, as it was but reasonable it should be, that the several villages adjacent and belonging to the five principal cities contributed their part towards the expense of the five golden emeralds, and five golden mice, since they were afflicted both in their persons, and especially in their fields, as well as those in the cities; though Kimchi and others think that the country villages sent each of them a golden emerald, and a golden mouse, fearing the presents of the five cities would not serve for them; and therefore, though the priests and diviners only ordered five of each, according to the number of the principal cities, yet they of themselves sent more: all the country villages that reached

even unto the great stone of Abel; the Targum is,

“unto the great stone”;

and so the Septuagint version, reading Eben instead of Ebal; or “lamed” is put for “nun”, as “nun” for “lamed”, (^{<1637>}Nehemiah 13:7,8). The Vulgate Latin version is unto great Abel, taking it for a city, as does Procopius Gazaeus, who calls it the great city Abel, through which they carried the ark of the Lord; so Jerom^{f128}, who takes it to be the same with Bethshemesh, called Abel because of the mourning in it for the men of Bethshemesh after slain; or to distinguish it from another Abel is called “great”, (^{<1005>}2 Samuel 20:15) but it seems plainly to be the same with the great stone, (^{<0064>}1 Samuel 6:14,15), here called Eben Gedolah, here Abel Gedolah, by the change of a letter, having its latter name by anticipation from the great mourning hereafter made, next mentioned:

whereon they set down the ark of the Lord; when it was taken out of the cart, as also the coffer in which were the presents, (^{<0065>}1 Samuel 6:15),

which: stone remaineth unto this day in the field of Joshua the Bethshemite: the supplement, which stone remaineth, seems necessary, lest it should be thought the ark remained there unto the time of the writing this

book, which was not true, for it was soon after this fetched to Kirjathjearim; but the stone remained, and might be seen; and posterity in following times were told that was the stone on which the ark was put when it returned to Israel.

Ver. 19. *And he smote the men of Bethshemesh*, etc.] That is, God smote them, though they had received the ark with such expressions of joy, and had offered sacrifices on account of it; yet sinning in one particular after mentioned, which was highly resented, they were smitten by him with a thunderbolt, as Josephus says ^{f129}:

because they had looked into the ark of the Lord; which was forbidden the Levites, (⁰⁴⁰³Numbers 4:20) out of curiosity these men opened the ark, to see whether the Philistines had taken anything out of it, or put anything into it; and this, when in the tabernacle, being only to be seen by the high priest; and supposing they should never have the like opportunity again, to look upon the tables of the law which were in it, took it; and the rather they might be emboldened to this action, since it had been in the hands of the uncircumcised Philistines, who had profaned it; and as yet not restored to its pristine purity, holiness, and place:

even he smote of the people fifty thousand and seventy men; but as Bethshemesh was but a small place, a village, as Josephus ^{f130} 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, as the Targum; which accounts not for the difficulty at all: others think that only seventy of the men of Bethshemesh died, and that 50,000 were such as flocked out of the country on this occasion; but as this was on the same day the ark came into those parts, it can hardly be thought that so great a number should be got together so soon; and still less that they should all of them open the ark, and look into it. 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: but others, and perhaps more truly, think that only seventy persons were smitten with death; for the order in which this account is given is different from all others in the Hebrew text, the lesser number being put first with a considerable distinguishing accent upon it, whereas the greater number is always expressed first; it stands thus, “of the people seventy men; 50,000 men”: 5000, according to the Syriac and Arabic versions. Josephus^{f131} is express for it that only seventy men were slain, and so some of the ancient Jews^{f132}; who say that these seventy were equal to 50,000, because of their superior excellency and dignity, as Ben Gersom observes, being the priests of the Lord, or the sanhedrim; but Bochart’s^{f133} sense seems to be preferable to all others, that there is a defect of the particle *m*, “out of”; and so to be read, either seventy men out of fifty thousand; that out of the 50,000 that flocked on this occasion from various parts, seventy were smitten for the reason before given; or rather seventy men, fifty out of 1000 men; that is, a twentieth part of the number of them, so that, out of 1400, seventy men were struck with death for their curiosity^{f134}. Something of this story seems to be retained by tradition among the Heathens; we are told^{f135} that when Troy was taken an ark was found, in which was the image of Bacchus; which being opened by Eurypylyus, he was struck with madness as soon as he saw the image:

and the people lamented, because the Lord had smitten [many] of the people with a great slaughter; I see no occasion for the supplement “many”; it was a great slaughter, if we consider the awful manner in which it was made, by thunder and lightning, as may be supposed; however, by an immediate stroke from heaven; and the persons on whom it was made, men of a sacred character, priests and Levites; and a great number, considering it was but a small city. Hence the place was called Abel, which signifies weeping, mourning, lamentation, (~~ORIG~~ 1 Samuel 6:18).

Ver. 20. *And the men of Bethshemesh said, who is able to stand before this holy Lord God?* etc.] The Targum is,

“before the ark of this holy Lord God;”

which is said either by way of complaint of the severity of God, and the strictness of his justice; or in reverence of his holiness, acknowledging their

imperfection, sin, and guilt, by reason of which they could not stand before him; nor can any, but on account of the mercy seat over the ark, or through Christ, his blood, righteousness, and sacrifice:

and to whom shall he go up from us? that is, the ark, the symbol of God's presence, which they seem to be desirous of parting with; being unworthy of it, and conscious of their impurity in comparison of God that dwelt in it; and of their weakness to give the honour and reverence that was due unto it; and yet they knew not who were fit for it, or would choose to receive it, because of the danger they were liable to through every inadvertency in them, and irreverence of that.

Ver. 21. *And they sent messengers to the inhabitants of Kirjathjearim,* etc.] Which was a city further on in the tribe of Judah, and lay among some woods, from whence it had its name, and was formerly called Kirjathbaal, from Baal's being worshipped there; of which (see ^{<065>}Joshua 15:9), they might choose to send hither to fetch the ark from them, because it was at a greater distance from the Philistines, their city Bethshemesh being on the borders of them; and because it might be a place of greater eminence and strength, and besides lay in the way to Shiloh, whereby they might suppose it was intended to be had; unless Shiloh was before this time destroyed:

saying, the Philistines have brought again the ark of the Lord; which they doubted not would be good news to them:

come ye down, and fetch it up to you; but say not one word of the reason of this request, lest it should discourage them; but rather represent it as a favour to them, and an honour done them, as indeed it was. Kirjathjearim seems to have stood on an eminence in comparison of Bethshemesh, and therefore it is said to come down from the one, and go up to the other. That Bethshemesh was in a valley, (see ^{<065>}1 Samuel 6:13) and this on a hill, (^{<070>}1 Samuel 7:1).