

1 Samuel 6:16

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And when the five lords of the Philistines had seen it, they returned to Ekron the same day.

Analysis

And when the five lords of the Philistines had seen it, they returned to Ekron the same day.

The Philistine seranim (lords) witnessed the entire sequence: the cows' miraculous journey, the Israelites' joyful reception, and the sacrificial worship. Having followed the cart to verify their test's outcome, they now had undeniable proof that Yahweh's hand had indeed struck them. Their return 'the same day' to Ekron - the nearest of the five cities - suggests they had seen enough. The phrase implies hasty departure, perhaps motivated by fear of further divine action. These pagan rulers, having witnessed Yahweh's power over nature (the cows) and His people's devotion, return to their own territory confirmed in their assessment but unchanged in their hearts. They acknowledged Yahweh's power sufficiently to appease Him but not enough to worship Him. This represents the limit of natural revelation - it can confirm God's existence and power but cannot, apart from grace, produce saving faith.

Historical Context

The five Philistine 'seranim' (a term possibly related to Greek 'tyrannos') ruled as a council over the pentapolis. Ekron, the northernmost city, lay closest to Beth-shemesh, explaining why they returned there. Their unified witness ensured that all five cities would receive firsthand testimony of these events.

Related Passages

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Study Questions

1. What is the spiritual significance of the Philistine lords witnessing Israelite worship but returning unchanged?
2. How does their departure illustrate the difference between acknowledging God's power and submitting to His lordship?

Interlinear Text

וַחֲמִשָּׁה ה	סֶרְנֵי	פְּלִשְׁתֵּי יָם	כָּא ו	וַיָּשׁוּ בו	עֶקְרוֹן
And when the five	lords	of the Philistines	had seen	it they returned	to Ekron
H2568	H5633	H6430	H7200	H7725	H6138
וּבַיּוֹם הַהוּא:					
the same day					
H3117	H1931				

Additional Cross-References

Joshua 13:3 (References Lord): From Sihor, which is before Egypt, even unto the borders of Ekron northward, which is counted to the Canaanite: five lords of the Philistines; the Gazathites, and the Ashdothites, the Eshkalonites, the Gittites, and the Ekronites; also the Avites:

1 Samuel 6:4 (References Lord): Then said they, What shall be the trespass offering which we shall return to him? They answered, Five golden emerods, and five golden mice, according to the number of the lords of the Philistines: for one plague was on you all, and on your lords.

Judges 3:3 (References Lord): Namely, five lords of the Philistines, and all the Canaanites, and the Sidonians, and the Hivites that dwelt in mount Lebanon, from mount Baal-hermon unto the entering in of Hamath.

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