

Major Study Questions for 1 Samuel

1. How do you explain 1 Samuel 2:25: (compare 1 Samuel 2:31; Exodus 4:21; 7:3; 9:12; Joshua 11:20; Isaiah 6:9,10).

Is it ever God's wish to put any human being to death? In the first death? In the second death? What do we do with passages in the Bible that seem to suggest that God does put people to death? The sons of Eli were very wicked as we know from 1 Samuel 2:12-17; 22-25; 27-36. God certainly knew this much better than we do. But what should God do when the people who by birthright should be the ones to best represent Him to the rest of His children are instead terribly misrepresenting Him? Should God say to the angels: "I really wish that they would stop doing all those evil things, but My love for all human beings, even the very evil ones who are misrepresenting Me paralyzes Me and prevents Me from doing anything about it? Should God allow the Devil and His representatives to walk all over Him just because He is such a good Guy and always has to be loving? Would it be loving on God's part to allow the sons of Eli to misrepresent God to the rest of the children of Israel so that many of them will be repulsed by their activities and abandon the worship of Yahweh? Or did Yahweh love the rest of His children too much to allow two of them to spiritually destroy the others? Look at the following translations of 1 Samuel 2:25:

/q|] W[m]vyl a|wQ|AI L,P' ty| ymi vyai Aaf; jQ hw: hyl ' lai wQhi l aO
 /| | pi W vyai |] vyai af; jQ Abi
 (Biblia Hebraica) .!tymh| ' hw|hyQ Apj AyKi hybia}

.. epan amartanwn amarth/ ajhr ei' ahdra, kai; proseukontai uper aujtou pro;" kurion, kai; epan tw/ kuriw/ amarth/ til' proseuketai uper aujtou; kai; ouk hkouon th" fwnh" tou patro;" aujtwn, ofti boulomeno" epouleto kurio" diafqeirai aujtoul'. (Septuagint - LXX)

...they obeyed not the voyce of their father, because the Lord would slay them. ([footnote: so that to obey good admonitions is God's mercy, and to disobey them is his just judgement for sinne] Geneva)

...they hearken not to the voice of their father, though Jehovah hath delighted to put them to death. (Young's Literal)

...they hearkened not to the voice of their father, for Yahweh was pleased to put them to death. (Rheims)

...they hearkened not unto the voice of their father, because the LORD would slay them. (KJV)

...But they hearkened not unto the voice of their father, because it pleased Jehovah to slay them. (Wellbeloved/Smith/Porter, 1859)

...they hearkened not to the voice of their father, for (because) Jehovah was minded to slay them. (Darby, ASV)

...they did not heed the voice of their father, because the LORD desired to kill them. (NKJV)

...But they would not listen to the voice of their father; for it was the will of the LORD to (slay) kill them. (RSV, NRSV)

...they did not listen to their father, for it was the Lord's will to slay them. (Amplified)

...But the LORD had already decided to kill them. So he kept them from listening to their father. (CEV)

...But they wouldn't listen to their father's warning—the LORD wanted to kill them. (God's Word)

...But they would not listen to their father, for the LORD had decided to kill them. (GNB)

...But they would not listen to their father (for Yahweh wanted to kill them). (Anchor)

...But they wouldn't listen to their father, for the Lord was already planning to kill them. (TLB)

...they would not listen to what their father said, for the Eternal was resolved to slay them. (Moffatt)

...But Eli's sons wouldn't listen to their father, for the LORD was already planning to put them to

death. (*NLT*)
 ...But they disregarded their father's warning, since the LORD had decided on their death. (*NAB*)
 ...But they would not listen to the voice of their father, for the LORD desired to put them to death. (*NASB, NASB 1995*)
 ...But Eli's sons would not listen to him, because the LORD had decided to put them to death. (*NCV*)
 ...His sons, however, did not listen to their father's rebuke, for it was the LORD's will to put them to death. (*NIV*)
 ...they did not listen to their father's rebuke, for the LORD meant that they should die. (*NEB*)
 ...They would not listen, however, to their father's rebuke, for the LORD meant to bring about their death. (*REB*)
 ...But they did not listen to their father's words, for Yahweh was bent on killing them. (*NJB*) [footnote: the 'hardening' of the sinner is attributed to Yahweh as its ultimate cause. But this form of expression in no way denies man's free will.]
 ...But they ignored their father's plea; for the LORD was resolved that they should die. (*Tanakh*)
 ...But his sons didn't pay any attention to him. So the Lord decided He must put an end to their wickedness. (*Clear Word*)

So who actually killed the sons of Eli? They died in battle with the Philistines. (1 Samuel 4:11) Then how can the Bible even suggest that God killed them? This statement must be compared to the death of Saul who fell on his own sword after being wounded as described in 1 Chronicles 10:13,14 and the death of Nabal who apparently died of a stroke from his partying and drinking. (1 Samuel 25:36-39) What about others such as Er and Onan (Genesis 38:7,10); The wicked before the flood (Genesis 6); the firstborn in Egypt (Exodus 12:26-29; 13:15; Numbers 3:11-13; 33:4); Aaron's sons: Nadab and Abihu (Leviticus 10:2; 16:1; Numbers 3:4); the Canaanites killed by the hailstones (Joshua 10:11); the northern Kings of Palestine (Joshua 11:6); the people killed by Samson with God's Spirit upon him (Judges 14:19); and the people of Beth Shemesh who were killed when they looked into the ark (1 Samuel 6:19 - see below). All of these individuals are described as being killed by the Lord. What did the Bible writers have in mind when they wrote these words? It seems in each case that the individuals involved had rejected Yahweh and rebelled against Him for a long period of time? As we have seen repeatedly in the earlier Scriptures, when this happens God finally leaves them to the consequences of their own behavior and the result is death. The Hebrew writers thus were looking to the ultimate causes in each case. This is not a misrepresentation of Yahweh, but only an acknowledgment that if God did not allow it it could not have happened. God was apparently active in each of these deaths, but not until each of these people had rebelled against Him and rejected Him repeatedly. Separated from the Source of life it doesn't really matter how they died. In these unusual cases God apparently had reason to remove them from the current of human events to allow other players to do their parts.

There is plenty of evidence in 1 Samuel alone that God was in contact with Samuel, Saul, and David on a regular basis. He gave them detailed instructions on what to do, who they would meet at certain places, how to conduct battles, and even directed their travel plans, telling them where it was safe to go and who would be reliable etc. (See 1 Samuel 10:1-9,22; 23:9-13; 2 Samuel 2:1-7) The book of Job, written hundreds of years earlier discusses the role of the devil in the case of Job. If God had wanted the people at this time to "correctly" ascribe these deaths to the devil, He certainly could have told them so.

"When David offended against God by numbering the people, **one angel caused that terrible destruction by which his sin was punished. The same destructive power exercised by holy angels when God commands, will be exercised by evil angels when He [allows] permits.** There are forces now ready, and only waiting the divine permission, to spread desolation everywhere." *Spirit of Prophecy* vol. 4, p. 441 (1884); 14MR 3; LDE 243; *Great Controversy* 614 (1888)

2. Does the Lord change His mind? 1 Samuel 2:30; 15:10,11,29,35; 26:19.

These passages need to be compared to others which are similar: Genesis 6:6,7; Exodus 32:14; Numbers 23:19,20; Judges 2:18; 2 Samuel 24:16; 1 Chronicles 21:14; Jeremiah 26:19; Amos 7:3,6; Jonah 3:10; and contrasted with others: Deuteronomy 10:17; 1 Samuel 15:29; Isaiah 40:8; Jeremiah 4:28; Zechariah 8:14; Malachi 3:6; Romans 11:29.

For some students of the Bible, these passages are a real problem. They seem to be in direct contradiction to each other. This is the exact reason why we need to take a very careful look at them! For example, look carefully at the four verses mentioned in 1 Samuel 15. God appears to go back and forth in His statements.

Some people try to explain such apparent flip-flops in God's thinking by suggesting that they are the result of the writer's lack of a full understanding of God, or perhaps a result of the writer's cultural background. (Compare Exodus 9:34-10:4 - who really hardened Pharaoh's heart?) But these suggestions are less than satisfactory if God actually has foreknowledge! Shouldn't God have known in advance that these passages would raise questions? Shouldn't He have left them out of Scripture?

But doesn't a more careful look at the entire context provide us with a more reasonable solution? Was it God's idea to make Saul king in the first place? No! The people were the ones who were insisting on a king. So God warned them, and Samuel warned them, but they still insisted. So God allowed them to have a king. He helped them choose the kind of king that they were looking for. But God knew from the beginning what the results of Saul's life would be. Wasn't God sorry even before Saul was made king that the people weren't willing to allow God Himself to be their king? Certainly God was not happy that Saul turned out the way he did! Would it be accurate then to say that God was sorry from the very beginning that He had to make Saul king? If that is correct, then all the statements we read in the chapter are fully correct! God was sorry He made Saul king, and God doesn't need to change His mind like humans do!

A careful look at the other passages allows a similar explanation. In Exodus 32:14 and Numbers 14:11-25, God is simply testing Moses, for the benefit of the onlooking universe. He wanted them to see what a loyal friend Moses actually was. Moses cared enough even about his former friends in Egypt that he didn't want them to think evil of Yahweh! And he certainly didn't want anyone to think less of Yahweh!

God was not sorry that He made humans. (Genesis 6:6,7) He Himself said that He was very pleased with His work in making us. (Genesis 1:31) But God knew what was coming. He knew that we would need a flood in Noah's day, but He was very sorry that it was necessary. Those were His children that were perishing! God was sorry that we made such poor use of our freedom of choice and so often chose to rebel against Him. But He would do it all just the same way if He had it all to do over again. Our freedom of choice is essential in our response to God's love and God wouldn't change that at any cost. (See handout #13 on "**Love**")

Repeatedly throughout Scripture, God weeps as He sees us make bad choices. But that doesn't mean that He would do things differently if He had it to do over again. So God does His best to represent Himself in a way that is meaningful to us in our language and culture. He portrays Himself as a human being might be portrayed. But He knows perfectly well how it is all going to work out in the end, and He does what He has to do anyway.

3. Did both the heathen and the Israelites think that the "ark" was a "god?" (1 Samuel 4:5-9; 5:7)

This was a common idea in their day. Heathen gods were almost invariably represented by an idol or at least by a picture or a symbol. By making use of these idols, pictures, or symbols the ancients believed that they could manipulate their "gods" to do what they wanted them to do. That is exactly what Hophni and Phinehas were trying to do. But Yahweh had His own agenda! By the time He finished and the ark was back at headquarters where it was supposed to be, everyone had a great deal more respect for Yahweh! And they realized pretty well that this "box" was a symbol of

something much stronger and more powerful than any of the pagan “gods” that they had dealt with before.

4. What happened at Beth Shemesh when the ark of God was returned? (1 Samuel 6:19):

Here is another verse that poses a problem for Bible translators. In this case, what the verse seems to say in Hebrew doesn't make good sense or even seem possible. How could over 50,000 people all look into the ark? Did God wait until all of them had “looked” before He killed those who had looked? If not, were others climbing over dead bodies to get to the ark so they could look and be killed also? It seems ridiculous. So what is really meant by this verse? Look at the different ways that translators have struggled to best represent the truth as they understand it.

M[B; JYW" hwby0 :-/raB' War; yKi vm,vAtybe yvøðB] JYW"
hKhAyKi M[h; Wl BätYw" vyai ¹ l a, MyVmij } vyai My [b]vi
Biblia Hebraica .hl /dg0 hKm' M[B; hwby0

¹⁹ Kai; ouk hsmenis an oilubi; leconiou ejn toi" andrasin Baiqsamu", ofti eidan kibwton kuriou, kai; epaitaxen ejn aujtoi" ebdomhkonta andra" kai; penthkonta ciliada" andrwn. kai; epenqhsen ol laoi", ofti epaitaxen kurio" ejn tw/law/ pl hghn megal hn sfodra. (*Septuagint*)

50,070 people died:

And he smote of the men of Beth-shemesh, because they had looking in the Arke of the Lord: he slew even among the people fiftie thousand men and threescore and ten men: (*Geneva* [Footnote: for it was not lawfull to any either to touch or to see it, save onely to Aaron and his sonnes, Numbers 4:15-20])

But he slew of the men of Bethsames, because they had seen the ark of the Lord: and he slew of the people seventy men, and fifty thousand of the common people. (*Douay-Confaternity*)

And he smote among the men of Beth-shemesh, because they had looked into the ark of the Lord, namely, he smote among the people seventy men and fifty thousand men: (*Leeser- Jewish*)

And he smote the men of Bethshemesh, because they had looked into the ark of the LORD, even he smote of the people fifty thousand and threescore and ten men: (*KJV*)

And he smote of the men of Beth-shemesh, because they had looked into the ark of Jehovah, he smote of the people seventy men, and fifty thousand men; (*ASV*)

Then He struck the men of Beth Shemesh, because they had looked into the ark of the LORD. He struck fifty thousand and seventy men of the people, (*NKJV*)

The sons of Jeconiah, however, did not rejoice along with the men of Beth-shemesh when they saw the ark of the Eternal; so he struck [[fifty thousand and]] seventy of them. (*Moffatt, 1935*)

And he went striking down the men of Beth-shemesh, because they had looked upon the ark of Jehovah. So he struck down among the people seventy men—fifty thousand men— (*New World*)

He struck down some of the men of Beth-shemesh because they had looked into the ark of the LORD. He struck down of all the people, 50,070 men, (*NASB; NASB, 1995* [Footnote: Exodus 19:21; Numbers 4:5, 15, 20; 2 Samuel 6:7])

The sons of Jechoniah, however, did not rejoice with the men of Bethshemesh, when they looked upon the ark of the LORD. Therefore he smote among them seventy men (fifty thousand men)... (*Smith-Goodspeed*)

70 people died:

And he smote among the men of Beth-shemesh, because they had looked into the ark of Jehovah, and smote of the people seventy men; (*Darby*)

And the Lord slew some of the men of Beth-shemesh, because they had looked into the ark of the Lord; He slew seventy men of them [fifty thousand men], (*Amplified*)

But God struck down some of the men of Beth Shemesh, putting seventy of them to death because they had looked into the ark of the LORD. [Footnote: a few Hebrew manuscripts; most Hebrew manuscripts and Septuagint: 50,070] (*NIV*)

Some of the men of Beth-Shemesh looked inside the sacred chest, and the LORD God killed seventy of them. [Footnote: *seventy*: a few Hebrew manuscripts; most Hebrew manuscripts: seventy men, fifty thousand men.] (*CEV*)

God struck down some of the people from Beth Shemesh because they looked inside the ark of the LORD. He struck down 70 people. [Footnote: “70 people” is found in a few Hebrew manuscripts and the writings of the ancient Jewish historian Josephus. Massoretic Text and Greek read “50,070 people”.] (*God’s Word*)

But the Lord killed seventy of the men of Beth-shemesh because they looked into the Ark. (*TLB*)

But the sons of Jeconiah did not rejoice with the rest of the men of Beth-shemesh when they welcomed the Ark of the LORD, and he struck down seventy of them. (*NEB, REB* adds [Footnote: *probable reading, compare Greek; Hebrew* And he struck down some of the men of Beth-shemesh because they had gazed upon the Ark of the LORD; he struck down seventy men among the people, fifty thousand men.]

The descendants of Jeconiah did not join in the celebration with the inhabitants of Beth-shemesh when they greeted the ark of the LORD, and seventy of them were struck down. (*NAB*)

Of the people of Beth–Shemesh the sons of Jeconiah had not rejoiced when they saw the ark of Yahweh, and (he) Yahweh struck down seventy of them. (*Jerusalem, NJB*)

And he slew some of the men of Beth-shemesh, because they looked into the ark of the LORD; he slew seventy men of them, (*RSV*)

The descendants of Jeconiah did not rejoice with the people of Beth-shemesh when they greeted the ark of the LORD; and he killed seventy men of them. [Heb: *killed seventy men, fifty thousand men*] (*NRSV*)

[The LORD] struck at the men of Beth-shemesh because they looked into the Ark of the LORD; He struck down seventy men among the people [and] fifty thousand men. [Footnote: *force of Hebrew uncertain*] (*Tanakh-Jewish*)

The LORD killed 70 of the men of Beth Shemesh because they looked inside the Covenant Box. (*GNB*)

Other possible explanations:

But the LORD killed seventy men from Beth-shemesh because they looked into the Ark of the LORD. [Footnote: As in a few Hebrew manuscripts; most Hebrew manuscripts and Greek version read *50,070 men*. Perhaps the text should be understood to read *the LORD killed 70 men and 50 oxen.*] (*New Living Translation*)

Following Israel’s defeat in the battle at Ebenezer, the people of Beth Shemech (sic) continued their wicked ways. Some of the men became curious about the Ark and went out and opened the cover to look inside. The Lord immediately punished them for their disobedience and seventy of them from fifty families died right there by the Ark. (*Clear Word*)

...He smiteth among the people seventy men—fifty chief men; (*Young’s Literal*)

But no members of the priesthood had joined in the celebration with the men of Beth-shemesh when they saw the ark of Yahweh, and so he struck down seventy of the people. ([Footnote: this translation was arrived at after a very thorough comparison of the original Hebrew which is defective in some respects with the *LXX* (Greek) translation and the commentary on this verse by Josephus] *Anchor*)

Other variations:

The Lord smote the men of Beth-shemesh because they worshiped the ark of the Lord. (*Lamsa*)
 ...for prying into the ark of the Lord. (*Knox*)

...he slew seventy of the people, fifty to the thousand, (*New Berkeley*)

See appendix for additional comments.

The original Hebrew of this passage is defective. The first part of the sentence is difficult to understand and translate and the numbers at the end can be understood in several different ways as we have seen above. This does not change the fact that there was irreverence shown for the ark of Yahweh. Yahweh recognizes that when reverence breaks down there is little chance that learning will take place. So repeatedly we see in Scripture that God deals with irreverence quite severely. What about the case of Uzzah? (See 2 Samuel 6:6-8) Consider with what reverence Moses and Joshua were asked to approach God. (See Exodus 3:1-5; Joshua 5:13-15)

God seems to struggle in Scripture back and forth between exercising His power in some way and scaring people to death and being kind and gentle and losing their respect. Which do you think leads to worse consequences?

5. What should we do with 1 Samuel 13:1? Can inspired writings have things left out of them? Did God make a mistake here? (Please note that this type of error is quite rare in the Scriptures)

Here is an example of a different type of problem in Scripture. Some key words are actually missing from the verse. How should we deal with such a problem? See how different translators have struggled with the issue:

A son of a year *is* Saul in his reigning, yea, two years he hath reigned over Israel. (*Young's Literal*)

Saul now had beene King one yeere, and hee reigned two yeeres over Israel. (*Geneva*)

Saul reigned one year; and when he had reigned two years over Israel, ... (*KJV, NKJV*)

Saul was...years old when he became king; and he reigned two years over Israel. (*Darby*)

Saul was a young man when he became king, and he ruled Israel for two years. (*CEV*)

By this time Saul had reigned for one year. In the second year of his reign,... (Footnote: *Saul had reigned for one year*. The Hebrew, from which the numbers have evidently dropped out in copying, reads: "Saul was ... years old when he began to reign, and he reigned ... and two years over Israel." *TLB*)

(Saul was...years old when he became king and he reigned... (two) years over Israel.) (Footnote: A formula like that of 2 Sam 5:4 was introduced here at some time; but the age of Saul when he became king remains a blank, and the two years assigned for his reign in the received text cannot be correct. Tradition (Acts 13:21) offers the round number "forty years."] *NAB*)

When Saul had reigned one year,—and two years he reigned over Israel,— (*Leeser-Hebrew*)

[[Saul was . . . years old when he began to reign, and he reigned for . . . years over Israel.]] (Moffatt)

Saul was [?] years old when he began to reign, and for two years he reigned over Israel. (*New World*)

Saul was . . . years old when he became king, and reigned over Israel for . . . years. (*NJB*)

Saul was . . . years old when he began to reign; and he reigned . . . and two years over Israel. (*RSV, NRSV* has: [Footnote: the number is lacking in the Hebrew text (the verse is lacking in the Septuagint)] [footnote: two is not the entire number; something has dropped out.]

Saul was ... years old when he became king, and he reigned over Israel two years. ([Footnote: *The number is lacking in the Hebrew text; also, the precise context of the "two years" is uncertain. The verse is lacking in the Septuagint.*] *Tanakh-Hebrew*)

By this time Saul had reigned for one year. When Saul had been king over Israel two years, (*Berkeley*)

Saul was a child of one year when he began to reign, and he reigned two years over Israel. (Footnote: *of one year*. This text is evidently the result of some confusion in the original Hebrew. It is not found in the Septuagint version.] *Douay-Confraternity*)

Saul was . . . years old when he began to reign, and he reigned . . . years over Israel. (*Anchor Bible*)

The scribes preferred to suppress or leave blank rather than correct. MT (the main Hebrew text) has "Saul was a year old (!) when he began to reign, and he reigned two years over Israel."... The first part of this statement exercised the ingenuity of the ancient commentators

and translators considerably. *Targums* (the Aramaic translation) has “like a one-year-old who has no sins was Saul when he became king.”... Wellhausen is probably correct in supposing the Hebrew word for “two” to be a corrupt duplication of the following Hebrew word for “years”. (The two words look very similar in Hebrew)

Note: This notice was inserted by the Deuteronomist in the spirit of his chronological framework for the stories about subsequent kings (cf. II Sam 2:10; 5:4; I Kings 14:21; 22:42; etc.), but the figures were not available to him or (if he had them) were subsequently lost. *Anchor Bible Commentary*

Saul was *thirty* years old when he became king, and he reigned over Israel *forty-* two years. ([Footnote: a few late manuscripts of the Septuagint. Hebrew does not have *thirty*.][Footnote: See the round number in Acts 13:21; Hebrew does not have *forty*-.] *NIV*)

Saul was thirty years old when he became king, and he reigned for forty-two years. ([Footnote: As in a few Greek manuscripts; the number is missing in the Hebrew.] [Hebrew *reigned ... and two*; the number is incomplete in the Hebrew. Compare Acts 13:21.] *NLT*)

Saul was thirty years old when he became king, and he was king over Israel forty-two years. ([Footnote: **Saul ... years** This is how the verse is worded in some early Greek copies. The Hebrew is not clear here.] *NCV*)

Saul was [thirty] years old when he became king, and he was king of Israel [forty-two] years. ([Footnote: The text of 1 Samuel 13:1 is problematic in all traditions. Some late Greek manuscripts state Saul was 30 years old when he became king. The ancient Jewish historian Josephus and Acts 13:21 state that Saul ruled for 40 years.] *God’s Word*)

Saul was thirty years old when he became king, and he reigned over Israel for twenty-two years. ([Footnote: **thirty years**: so some Gk MSS; Heb. A year. **twenty-two**: prob. rdg.; Heb. two.] *REB*)

Saul was thirty years old when he began to reign and he reigned for forty years. He had completed his first year as king of Israel and was in his second year when he decided to attack the Philistines. (*Clear Word*)

Saul was *forty* years old when he began to reign; and when he had reigned two years over Israel, (*ASV*)

Saul was [*forty*] years old when he began to reign; and when he had reigned two years over Israel, (Footnote: the complete numbers in this verse are missing in the Hebrew. The word “forty” is supplied by the best available estimate.] *Amplified*)

Saul was *forty* years old when he began to reign, and he reigned *thirtytwo* years over Israel. (*NASB, NASB 1995*)

Saul was fifty years old when he became king, and he reigned over Israel for *twenty-two*^b years. ([a. Fifty years: prob. rdg.; *Heb. a year*.] [b. prob. rdg.; *Heb. two*] *NEB*)

{The verse is left out entirely} [Footnote: *One Ancient Translation* does not have verse 1; *Hebrew has as verse 1* Saul was ... years old when he became king, and he was king of Israel for two years. *The Hebrew text is defective at two points in this verse*.] (*GNB*)

{The verse is left out entirely} (*Jerusalem Bible*)

This example is quite a puzzle, as suggested by some of the notes above. It looks like someone was trying to include all the appropriate chronological data for each king so that people could calculate the time periods involved. But apparently the one who included this text (we don’t know for sure if it was the original writer, possibly Samuel, or a later editor, possibly Ezra, who put this verse in) didn’t know what these numbers were supposed to be at the time. It is interesting that the whole purpose of such a verse is the numbers and it is the numbers that are missing! While this verse causes us to scratch our heads to explain its origin, it, of course, has no impact on our understanding of God. Isn’t it likely that in this case there was a simple human error made by someone. It does encourage me to realize that instead of correcting it as they saw fit (as the Egyptians scribes did with their writings all the time) the Hebrews faithfully copied this “error” for thousands of years. That should give us some clues as to how carefully they preserved the rest of the Old Testament Scriptures!

The challenge of recovering the original text, sometimes called textual criticism or lower criticism, is a sophisticated science. What would you do with the above verse with the two key words missing? Would it be best to leave it as it is and let people struggle with the problem themselves? Look at the sequence that textual scholars usually go through to arrive at the best possible reading of a given passage:

1) First they look at all the manuscripts available in the original language. The older manuscripts are given more weight than more recent manuscripts. In this case, the numbers are not included in any Hebrew manuscript until very late.

2) Next the scholars will look at commentaries in the original language. Perhaps an ancient commentary will talk about a verse and give us a hint of some reading that he was looking at that we no longer have available to us.

3) Scholars also look at ancient translations such as the Greek Septuagint (the LXX), the translation of the “Seventy” begun in Alexandria, Egypt about 200 BC. Again we are suspecting that the translators may have had some documents available to them that are older than the ones that we now have available to us. But we now have the problem of translation as well. Are differences in readings due to having earlier, and perhaps more accurate, documents available to them, or do the differences represent changes that came about in the translation process itself?

4) Finally, we may look at other assorted documents written by historians, such as Josephus, or even on occasion by unknown authors that comment on a verse or translation. As you can see in the various notes and variations in readings above, all of these methods have been tried on this verse.

Should this verse then be regarded as not inspired, or only partially inspired? What about all the other verses in the Old Testament for which we have less than a completely clear understanding of the original authors words or meaning? What do people say who believe that the Bible was verbally inspired and dictated by God? Does this idea of verbal inspiration seem to be supported by the evidence that we have seen so far in the Old Testament?

6. If you had been looking down from heaven at events as they were happening in the times of the Judges, Ruth and Samuel, what possible solution could you suggest to deal with the problems afflicting the children of Israel? Doesn't it look like they needed someone to instruct them about the truth? What would be the best way to do this? How about some schools where bright young men (and women?) could be educated to teach and instruct the others? Did they have such schools? What were the “schools of the prophets?” Who started the schools of the prophets? (See EGW quotes below) Compare 1 Samuel 10:5; 9-12; 19:18-24; 28:6,15; 1 Kings 18:4,13; 19:10

The true knowledge of God seems to have reached a very low level in those times. But God through Samuel, developed a plan that proved to be of enormous benefit to the entire nation: a series of schools where young people could be educated. They were educated in spiritual matters but also in the practical matters of life. Each one was expected to learn a trade with his hands. This was to prevent him or her from ever falling into poverty. Every Hebrew child was to learn to support himself. Even the apostle Paul used his trade of tent-making as a means to support himself and others when necessary.

But most important, these schools served as an opportunity for young men to study and learn the Scriptures in considerable detail. They could then serve as teachers for the rest of the people. This eventually led to a system of schools and synagogues where all of Israel were to learn about Yahweh. If only they had learned their lessons better!

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Ellen White Comments

What happened at Beth-Shemesh?

“The men of Beth-shemesh were curious to know what great power could be in that ark, which caused it to accomplish such marvelous things.... And as the people gratified their curiosity and

opened the ark to gaze into its sacred recesses, which the heathen idolaters had not dared to do, **the angels attending the ark slew above fifty thousand of the people.**" *Spiritual Gifts* vol. 4a, p. 110 (1864); *Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. 1, p. 409 (1870); SR 190,191

"The men of Beth-shemesh quickly spread the tidings that the ark was in their possession, and the people from the surrounding country flocked to welcome its return. The ark had been placed upon the stone that first served for an altar, and before it additional sacrifices were offered unto the Lord. Had the worshipers repented of their sins, God's blessing would have attended them. But they were not faithfully obeying His law; and while they rejoiced at the return of the ark as a harbinger of good, they had no true sense of its sacredness. Instead of preparing a suitable place for its reception, they permitted it to remain in the harvest field. As they continued to gaze upon the sacred chest and to talk of the wonderful manner in which it had been restored, they began to conjecture wherein lay its peculiar power. At last, overcome by curiosity, they removed the coverings and ventured to open it. {589.1}

"All Israel had been taught to regard the ark with awe and reverence. When required to remove it from place to place the Levites were not so much as to look upon it. Only once a year was the high priest permitted to behold the ark of God. Even the heathen Philistines had not dared to remove its coverings. Angels of heaven, unseen, ever attended it in all its journeyings. The irreverent daring of the people at Beth-shemesh was speedily punished. Many were smitten with sudden death. {589.2}

"The survivors were not led by this judgment to repent of their sin, but only to regard the ark with superstitious fear. Eager to be free from its presence, yet not daring to remove it, the Beth-shemites sent a message to the inhabitants of Kirjath-jearim, inviting them to take it away." *Patriarchs and Prophets* 589.

"Let men of today take warning from the fate of those who in ancient times presumed to make free with that which God had declared sacred. When the Israelites ventured to open the ark on its return from the land of the Philistines, their irreverent daring was signally punished. 'He smote of the men of Beth-shemesh, because they had looked into the ark of Jehovah, He smote of the people seventy men, and fifty thousand men; and the people mourned, because Jehovah had smitten the people with a great slaughter. And the men of Beth-shemesh said, Who is able to stand before Jehovah, this holy God?' 1 Samuel 6:19, 20, A. R. V. {8T 282.2}

"Again, consider the judgment that fell upon Uzzah. As in David's reign, the ark was being carried to Jerusalem, Uzzah put forth his hand to keep it steady. For presuming to touch the symbol of God's presence, he was smitten with instant death." 8T 283, 284

"Samuel had founded the first regular establishments for religious instruction and the unfolding of the prophetic gifts. Among the chief subjects of study, were the law of God with the instructions given to Moses, sacred history, sacred music, and poetry. In these 'schools of the prophets' young men were educated by those who were not only well versed in divine truth, but who themselves maintained close communion with God and had received the special endowment of His Spirit. These educators enjoyed the respect and confidence of the people both for learning and piety. The power of the Holy Spirit was often strikingly manifest in their assemblies, and the exercise of the prophetic gift was not infrequent. These schools, or colleges, were of untold value to Israel, not only as providing for the dissemination of religious truth, but as preserving the spirit of vital godliness (ST July 20, 1882)." {2BC 1037.7}

"The manifestation of the Holy Spirit was similar to its manifestation in the days of Samuel and Saul in the school of the prophets. On one occasion the showers of grace were outpoured, and all that were gathered together were prophesying. Saul drew near, and though when he came, he was filled with a restless, envious, jealous spirit because of David, yet he caught the spirit that was animating those who were praising God, and he also sang praises. The word of inquiry went out, 'Is Saul also among the prophets?'" (*Special Testimonies on Education* p. 79 (1897)

"As a result, God **struck fifty thousand and seventy of** them. Fearful of having the ark remain in their midst, the people **sent messengers to** the men of **Kirjath Jearim**, and asked them to **take the ark**. (It is doubtful that there were 50,070 men at Beth Shemesh. Josephus,⁶ Keil and Delitzsch and many other authorities say that the text should simply read seventy men, since the 50,000 is lacking in many Hebrew manuscripts.) (*Believer's Bible Commentary* - article on 1 Samuel 6:19)

"The disaster at Beth-shemesh (6:19) was obviously totally unexpected by the Israelite people who lived there; they had, they supposed, been as cautious and devout in handling the ark as the

Philistines had been since the start of the epidemic. For instance, they made sure that it was carried only by Levites, the sacred personnel specially entrusted with the care of sacred objects. Nowadays we should no doubt attribute the death of seventy people to the same epidemic that had ravaged neighbouring Philistine districts, but Israelite piety rightly saw, though nothing was known of germs and bacteria, that God is in control of the mysteries of life and death.

"The explanation given was an interpretation after the event. It seems that some citizens were guilty of unseemly curiosity with regard to the ark, although it is not clear from the Hebrew whether they peered into it, as the RSV has it, or merely gazed at it. Another explanation is incorporated in the ancient Greek version (known as the Septuagint), and it has been adopted as original by many modern scholars and by the NEB: " The sons of Jeconiah did not rejoice with the rest of the men of Beth-shemesh when they welcomed the ark of the Lord, and he struck down seventy of them. " In either case, we would be inclined to feel that the punishment far outweighed the fault, but the passage is at pains to stress the power of God and to warn any Israelites of later centuries who were heedless of him.

At any rate, the ark was temporarily settled at Kiriath-jearim, a step on its way to Jerusalem, but that was still some way in the future (cp. [2 Sam. 6](#)). It may be that the Philistines, glad though they were to be rid of the ark, refused to permit it to be taken to any major Israelite sanctuary. If so, Israel's lamentation ([7:2](#)) is the more readily understood. Besides, Israel was still reeling from the effects of the two defeats in battle. The Philistine victories permitted them to impose their will over much of Israel's territory. The retrieval of the ark was a temporary cause for joy, but the Philistine domination was not lessened by it. Nevertheless, the return of the ark to Israelite soil was a sign of hope and promise. The "glory" had come back to Israel (cp. [4:22](#)) and Israel could be sure that their God would not remain inactive for ever. The certainty of God's presence is always a sign of hope, however dark the circumstances may be." (*Daily Study Bible Series*: article on 1 Samuel 6:19)

"*He smote 50,070 men.* This account of the numbers smitten is expressed in a very unusual manner in the original, which, besides the improbability that there should be so many guilty and so many slain, occasions many learned men to question whether we take the matter aright. In the original it is, *He smote in (or among) the people three score and ten men, fifty thousand men.* The Syriac and Arabic read it, *five thousand and seventy men.* The Chaldee reads it, *seventy men of the elders, and fifty thousand of the common people. Seventy men as valuable as 50,000,* so some, because they were priests. Some think the seventy men were the Beth-shemites that were slain for looking into the ark, and the 50,000 were those that were slain by the ark, in the land of the Philistines. *He smote seventy men,* that is, *fifty out of a thousand,* which was one in twenty, a half decimation; so some understand it. The Septuagint read it much as we do, *he smote seventy men, and fifty thousand men.* Josephus says only seventy were smitten." (*Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible* - article on 1 Samuel 6:19) "The number smitten is expressed in an unusual manner in the original, and it is probable that it means 1170." (*Matthew Henry's Concise Commentary on the Bible*)

"***Fifty thousand and three score and ten men.*** Literally, "seventy men, fifty thousand men." In the Hebrew no conjunction "and" occurs here. Contrary to normal Hebrew syntax, the smaller number comes first. The peculiar word sequence makes the text most difficult of translation. Some have suggested, "He smote seventy men; fifty out of a thousand," or, "He slew seventy men out of fifty thousand men." Three reputable Hebrew manuscripts omit the words "fifty thousand." In [Judges 6:15](#) 'eleph, "thousand," is translated "family." It is possible that it should be translated "family" here also. If so, the statement would read, "And he smote among the people 70 men of 50 families." Most commentators agree that only 70 men of Beth-shemesh were slain. Yet in a city as small as Beth-shemesh even this would be a terrible calamity. Of course, the Philistines would hear of it, and would have one more evidence that God honored their refusal to look into the ark and their reverence for it." (*SDA Bible Commentary* article on 1 Samuel 6:19)

"The numbers in [v. 19](#) have created a problem, for there were not 50,000 people in that little village. In Hebrew, letters are used for numbers, and it is easy for a scribe to miscopy or misread a letter. It is likely that seventy men were judged instantly, certainly a "great slaughter" for such a small village. The problem does not affect anything crucial. It is important that we know God did judge their sin. How many were slain is not a vital matter." (*Wiersbe's Expository Outlines of the Old Testament*, article on 1 Samuel 6:19)

⁶ ([6:19–21](#)) Flavius Josephus, *The Works of Flavius Josephus* (*Ant. vi 1:4*), p. 178.