

The Ark of God Among the Philistines

I Samuel 5:1-12

Introduction:

- Last time we looked at how Israel lost badly to the Philistines, and God taught them a lesson for trusting in His ark, rather than trusting in Him
- Sadly, the state of Israel was described as the glory of God had departed. Now, we see the ark is among the Philistines.
- The trip from Ebenezer to Ashdod was about 19 miles. Ashdod, along with Ashkelon, Ekron, Gaza, and Gath was one of Philistia's five major cities

I. **WHEN IDOLS BOW DOWN**

- a. The Ark was not a good luck charm, but it was a holy artifact designated by God
 - i. Holiness- set apart for God's use
 - ii. Represented the very presence of God- a very holy thing indeed!
- b. V. 1-2- They set it before their god, Dagon
 - i. No doubt, the Philistines were excited, and confident in the superiority of their god over the God of Israel. They had faced the God of Israel in battle, and believed their god Dagon delivered the victory. Now, the Ark of the Covenant of Israel's God stood as a trophy in the temple of their god Dagon. The conquest seemed complete.
- c. Dagon was considered the father of Baal. He was half fish and half man, the symbol of fertility and multiplication.
- d. V. 3-4- Imagine the horror of the Philistine priests when they entered the temple of Dagon the next morning. First they saw their god bowing down before the Lord, then the next day they also saw the idol broken! It was hard to account for such an accident two days in a row and for the broken head and hands of Dagon.
 - i. Dagon's head and palms breaking off proved this was no accident or coincidence! There is no such thing as coincidence, but there is God's providence!
 - ii. Is there any significance in the pieces which broke? There is no wisdom (head) or power (hands) to be found in idols!

- e. We too have idols in our lives that need to bow down, and break before God!
- f. Money, pride/selfishness, popularity, materialism, etc.
- g. “Lord Jesus, I long to be perfectly whole,
I want Thee forever to live in my soul;
Break down every idol, cast out every foe;
Now wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.”
- h. FB Meyer- “Let this scene be reproduced in your heart! Let Jesus enter and the dearest idols you have known will yield before Him. The presence of Christ, which brings terror to his foes, will bring blessing and deliverance to those that love Him.”
- i. V. 5- They chose to follow a religious tradition rather than submit to the evidence of the true and living God.
- j. There are many people who look at all the evidence of God and still choose to reject Him. There is more evidence in support of the reality of God, but skeptics reject despite the evidence not because of the evidence.

II. GOD VINDICATES HIS NAME

- a. We have already noted how God’s glory is a very precious thing- Ch. 4:22
- b. God provokes the Philistines and vindicates His name
- c. Vindication- God will glorify Himself. Sometimes when men disgrace the glory of God, we fear God will go without glory. We think the glory has departed and we have to get it back ourselves. But when men and women will not glorify God, God will glorify Himself.
- d. God is self-sufficient being. We are co-dependent beings. Job 22:2-4, Acts 17:24-25
- e. Yet, God in his grace desires to use us!
- f. God’s judgment against profanity or sacrilege (profane person Esau). Many profane God, profane His ways, His Day, His tithe, His worship, and His temple which we are!
- g. Unlike Dagon, God doesn’t need someone to come and set him back up again. He doesn’t need any carrying; He will carry His people- Is 46:1-4
- h. In pagan customs the gods often depend upon man to sustain them- God corrects this way of thinking.
- i. God does not need us, but He does want to use us!

III. THE HAND OF THE LORD

- a. The ark had fallen into their hands, but now they have fallen into God’s hand!- Davis

- b. The hand of the Lord was very heavy on the people of Ashdod: They would not listen when God struck down their statue of Dagon; they just set it up again. When we close our ears to God, He often finds another way to speak to us, and we may not like the second way.
- c. (1Sa 5:6-8) The Lord afflicts the city of Ashdod with tumors or hemorrhoids
- d. What were these tumors? Older commentators often describe them as hemorrhoids, and newer commentators often describe them as signs of the bubonic plague (1 Sam 6:4 which causes boils and death)
- e. V. 11-12- The Philistines realized that their affliction was from the God of Israel, and they rightly associated their suffering with the stolen Ark of the Covenant. But they wrongly assumed a change of location would help. They sent the Ark to Gath, another Philistine city. At Gath, God “smote the men of the city, both small and great, and they had emerods in their secret parts” (1 Samuel 5:9).
- f. V. 10-11-The Philistines tried again, sending the Ark on to Ekron
- g. V. 10-12- The Philistines were playing hot potato
- h. The world is to experience the judgments and plagues of God in a future day foreshadowed in these plagues which came upon the land of the Philistines; and there will be no turning to God- Rev. 16:11
- i. God plagued them as he had plagued the Egyptians- 4:8
- j. What was the purpose of that?
 - i. Served at least two purposes: to show the Israelites that the God of their fathers was alive and worthy of their worship and to show the Egyptians that their gods were nothing.
 - ii. Ex 7:17- Thus saith the LORD, In this thou shalt know that I am the LORD...
- k. The hand of God could be a place of blessing, and security
 - i. John 10:28-29
 - ii. Is 59:1-2- the hand/power of God!
- l. V. 11-12- Send away the ark: The Philistines, if they had repented and turned towards the Lord, could have benefited from the ark. Instead it became a curse and a judgment to them. The same is true of the presence of God among men today, which can be as a fragrance of life to some and the aroma of death to others (2 Corinthians 2:15-16).

Conclusion:

- We must have a biblical understanding of the mighty God that we serve!
- What idols are in our lives that we still have not stopped trusting in?