

1 Samuel 05 - The Philistines' Troubles Because of the Ark

II. The Ark's travels (4:1b—7:17)

(2) God demonstrates his sovereignty over the false gods of the Philistines through the Ark (5:1-12)

(A) Yahweh's supremacy over Dagon (5:1-5)

(B) Yahweh's supremacy in each Philistine city (5:6-12)

(a) Ashdod (5:6-7)

(b) Gath (5:8-9)

(c) Ekron (5:10-12)

1 Samuel 5

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(A) Yahweh's supremacy over Dagon (5:1-5)

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- What seemed like a huge victory for the Philistines was really just the beginning of their problems...

- "...Ashdod" - one of the five primary Philistine cities

2 Then the Philistines took the ark of God and brought it into the house of Dagon, and placed it beside **Dagon**.

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2 When the Philistines took the ark of God, they brought it into the house of Dagon, and set it by Dagon.

- "...Dagon" - the main deity of the Philistines; he was the father of the storm god Baal

— His name means "grain"; he was the grain god whom the Philistines worshipped as the source of bountiful harvests (fertility)

3 When the Ashdodites got up early the next day, behold, Dagon had **fallen on his face** to the ground before the ark of the LORD. So they took Dagon and set him back in his place.

3 When the Ashdodites arose early the next morning, behold, Dagon had fallen on his face to the ground before the ark of the LORD. So they took Dagon and set him in his place again.

3 When the people of Ashdod got up the next morning, there was Dagon, lying on the ground in front of the Ark of the LORD. They took Dagon and put him back in his place.

3 And when they of Ashdod arose early on the morrow, behold, Dagon was fallen upon his face to the earth before the ark of the LORD. And they took Dagon, and set him in his place again.

- "...fallen upon his face" - the Philistines probably regarded the fact that Dagon fell on his face before the Ark as indicating Yahweh's superiority; he was in a posture of worship — What's the point in worshipping a God that you have to help up off the floor (Cf. Is 46:7). This is evidence that God has a sense of humor. Later, Goliath, the Philistine champion, would fall on his face before David (17:49).

4 But when they got up early the next morning, behold, Dagon had fallen on his face to the ground before the ark of the LORD. And the head of Dagon and both palms of his hands *were* cut off on the **threshold**; only the torso of Dagon was left.

4 But when they arose early the next morning, behold, Dagon had fallen on his face to the ground before the ark of the LORD. And the head of Dagon and both the palms of his hands *were* cut off on the threshold; only the trunk of Dagon was left to him.

4 But when they got up the next morning, there was Dagon, lying on the ground again in front of the Ark of the LORD. Dagon's head and both of his arms were broken off and lying on the threshold. Only the trunk of Dagon was left intact.

4 And when they arose early on the morrow morning, behold, Dagon was fallen upon his face to the ground before the ark of the LORD; and the head of Dagon and both the palms of his hands were cut off upon the threshold; only the stump of Dagon was left to him.

- This time, the head (representing his sovereign control) and his palms (representing his power), broke off

— In ancient times, casualty counts from war would be done by cutting off the right hand (Cf. 29:4; Judges 8:6; Dan 5:5). Thus, it appeared that Someone had defeated Dagon.

— Later, David would cut off Goliath's head (17:51) and the Philistines would cut off King Saul's head (1 Chr 10:10)

- "...threshold" - can also mean the pedestal on which the idol stood

5 For that reason neither the priests of Dagon nor any who enter Dagon's house step on the threshold of Dagon in Ashdod to this day.

5 Therefore neither the priests of Dagon nor all who enter Dagon's house tread on the threshold of Dagon in Ashdod to this day.

5 This is why neither the priests of Dagon nor anyone who enters the temple of Dagon step on the threshold of Dagon in Ashdod to this day.

5 Therefore neither the priests of Dagon, nor any that come into Dagon's house, tread on the threshold of Dagon in Ashdod unto this day

- So embarrassed were the Philistines over this misfortune of their god that they forever refused to set foot on the scene of his calamity

(B) Yahweh's supremacy in each Philistine city (5:6-12)

(a) Ashdod (5:6-7)

6 Now the **hand of the LORD** was heavy on the Ashdodites, and He made them feel devastated and struck them with **tumors**, both Ashdod and its territories.

6 Now the hand of the LORD was heavy on the Ashdodites, and He ravaged them and smote them with tumors, both Ashdod and its territories.

6 The LORD heavily oppressed the people of Ashdod, devastating and afflicting Ashdod and its territories with tumors of the groin.

6 But the hand of the LORD was heavy upon them of Ashdod, and he destroyed them, and smote them with emerods, even Ashdod and the coasts thereof.

- "...hand of the LORD" - represents God in action (Cf. Ex 9:3; Jer 21:5-6). This phrase is used 9x in this section (4:8; 5:6,7,9,11; 6:3,5,9; 7:13).

- "...tumors" - *'ophel*, indicates a hemorrhoid-like condition in the rectal area, as suggested in many versions: "emerods" [ASV]; "hemorrhoids" [NASB]; "tumors" [NIV]

— The Lord sent a plague on the inhabitants of Ashdod which was evidently carried by mice ("rats" [NIV]; 6:4-5) and also caused painful growths to erupt on their bodies

In Deut 28:27 (in the "cursings" formula) Israel is threatened with loathsome diseases of the skin including *o'phel*. This could be the first time in history when the bubonic plague (characterized by swellings, especially in the lymph glands of groin and armpits) was observed to be associated with rodents.

7 When the men of Ashdod saw that it was so, they said, "The ark of the God of Israel must not remain with us, because His hand is severe on us and on Dagon our god."

7 When the men of Ashdod saw that it was so, they said, "The ark of the God of Israel must not remain with us, for His hand is severe on us and on Dagon our god."

7 When the men of Ashdod saw how things were, they said, "Don't let the Ark of the God of Israel stay with us, because he is severely attacking us and our god Dagon."

7 And when the men of Ashdod saw that it was so, they said, The ark of the God of Israel shall not abide with us: for his hand is sore upon us, and upon Dagon our god.

- The residents of Ashdod are effectively claiming Yahweh's superiority over Dagon, but obstinately continue in their unbelief

— They are realizing that they are up against something much more powerful than the god they are currently worshipping. This had to have been quite a blow to someone who has put their trust and commitment into a false god.

In our culture today, we don't see many people worshipping gods such as Dagon, but we do see the same type of stupidity. In fact, our culture has invented the most insulting god of all...for the Philistines to attribute the creation and other sorts of things to Dagon is offensive to the Living God and Creator of the universe. But do you know what is even more offensive? To look at creation and ascribe it to nothingness, that it came from random accidents. To ascribe the skill and precision of creation to someone or some thing other than the Living God is foolishness, insulting, and blasphemy...yet that is the foundational belief in our society...not only in our biological sciences, but in our laws and our entire culture.

(b) Gath (5:8-9)

8 So they sent *word* and gathered all the governors of the Philistines to them, and said, "What shall we do with the ark of the God of Israel?" And they said, "Have the ark of the God of Israel brought to Gath." So they took the ark of the God of Israel away.

8 So they sent and gathered all the lords of the Philistines to them and said, "What shall we do with the ark of the God of Israel?" And they said, "Let the ark of the God of Israel be brought around to Gath." And they brought the ark of the God of Israel *around*.

8 They sent messengers and gathered together all the lords of the Philistines and asked, "What are we to do with the Ark of the God of Israel?"

They said, "Let the Ark of the God of Israel move to Gath." So they moved the Ark of the God of Israel.

8 They sent therefore and gathered all the lords of the Philistines unto them, and said, What shall we do with the ark of the God of Israel? And they answered, Let the ark of the God of Israel be carried about unto Gath. And they carried the ark of the God of Israel about thither.

- Ashdod just wanted the ark out of their city, so they had it sent down to Gath; let it be Gath's problem

9 After they had taken it away, the hand of the LORD was against the city, *creating* a very great panic; and He struck the people of the city, from the young to the old, so that **tumors** broke out on them.

9 After they had brought it around, the hand of the LORD was against the city with very great confusion; and He smote the men of the city, both young and old, so that tumors broke out on them.

9 After they moved it, the LORD moved against the town, causing a very great panic. He struck the men of the town, from young to old with tumors of the groin.

9 And it was so, that, after they had carried it about, the hand of the LORD was against the city with a very great destruction: and he smote the men of the city, both small and great, and they had emerods in their secret parts.

- "...tumors" - hemorrhoid (see note on v6)

- The people of Ashdod should have turned from worshipping Dagon and put their trust in *Yahweh*. Death followed because they chose to continue in their unbelief.

(c) Ekron (5:10-12)

10 So they sent the ark of God to Ekron. And as the ark of God came to Ekron, the Ekronites cried out, saying, "They have brought the ark of the God of Israel to us, to kill us and our people!"

10 So they sent the ark of God to Ekron. And as the ark of God came to Ekron the Ekronites cried out, saying, "They have brought the ark of the God of Israel around to us, to kill us and our people."

10 Then they sent the Ark of God to Ekron. When the Ark of God arrived in Ekron, the people of Ekron cried out, "They have brought the Ark of the God of Israel to us to kill us and our people!"

10 Therefore they sent the ark of God to Ekron. And it came to pass, as the ark of God came to Ekron, that the Ekronites cried out, saying, They have brought about the ark of the God of Israel to us, to slay us and our people.

- The reputation of the Ark preceded it's arrival in Ekron; the residents did not welcome this "trophy of war"

11 Therefore they sent *word* and gathered all the governors of the Philistines, and said, "Send away the ark of the God of Israel and let it return to its own place, so that it will not kill us and our people!" For there was a deadly panic throughout the city; the hand of God was very heavy there.

11 They sent therefore and gathered all the lords of the Philistines and said, "Send away the ark of the God of Israel, and let it return to its own place, so that it will not kill us and

our people." For there was a deadly confusion throughout the city; the hand of God was very heavy there.

11 They sent messengers and gathered together all the Philistine lords: "Send away the Ark of the God of Israel, and let it return to where it belongs so that it does not kill us and our people." Meanwhile, a deadly panic had spread all over the town, and God kept on pressuring them there.

11 So they sent and gathered together all the lords of the Philistines, and said, Send away the ark of the God of Israel, and let it go again to his own place, that it slay us not, and our people: for there was a deadly destruction throughout all the city; the hand of God was very heavy there.

12 And the people who did not die were struck with tumors, and the outcry of the city went up to heaven.

12 And the men who did not die were smitten with tumors and the cry of the city went up to heaven.

12 The people who did not die were afflicted with tumors of the groin, and the cry of the town went up to heaven.

12 And the men that died not were smitten with the emerods: and the cry of the city went up to heaven.

- The cry that went up to heaven from Philistia recalls the death cry that went up to heaven earlier from Egypt (Ex 12:30)

Lessons

- Neither Israel (1 Sam 4) or the Philistines (1 Sam 5) could control or resist God's will
 - We can not manipulate God; we must follow Him rather than expecting Him to follow us
- God will not reveal His power on behalf of His sinning people, but He will not allow His glory to be mocked or His Name to be defiled by a smirking enemy
- The lords of the Philistines added the Ark to their other religious relics in their heathen temple and put Jehovah on the same level as their fishgod Dagon
 - Of course, God stands high above all other gods! No wonder the heathen idol fell on its face before the ark! (see Is 19:1).
 - The men put Dagon back on his feet because he was powerless to help himself; but the next day they found their beloved idol without hands and head!
 - Jehovah had proved Dagon to be a false god; He had vindicated His Name. Dagon lost his hands, but the hand of the Lord was heavy in judgment upon Ashdod (v6)

- God sent “emerods” and mice (6:4) to plague the people. The ark was then moved from Ashdod to Ekron, but the citizens there begged to have it removed! Once again, God defended His name.