

“God Will Not Remain Silent” PART 2 (1 Samuel 5)

1. The Showdown at Ashdod among the Philistines (v.1-5)

- Dagon: He was the highest ranking of all the Philistine gods (Judges 16:23; 1 Chronicles 10:10). He is a fertility deity that includes grain and rain.
- The ark as a trophy is placed in front of Dagon to not only show which nation had triumphed, but whose god had won. Many of the pagan nations believed that when they would go to war, it was not just the people who fought; their god (or gods) also fought one another as well.
- The subject of the verbs “captured it, brought it, set it up, and took up” indicate that the Philistines think they have taken the god of Israel as a “passive prisoner” who is powerless. By placing the ark beside Dagon, they believe the LORD is now going to be “serving” Dagon.

Scene 1: The ark of God is placed next to, or in front of Dagon (v.2)

Scene 2: Dagon has fallen face first onto the ground in front of the ark of God (v.3)

- Dagon, the supposed ultimate, powerful deity, is bowing with face to the ground in front of the ark of God in homage and humble submission of the LORD’s superiority (Genesis 17:7, 17, 19:1, 24:52; Nehemiah 8:6).
- The people of Ashdod pick Dagon’s face off the ground.
- The people wonder whether Dagon has fallen dead (Deut. 22:4) or if he has fallen prostrate in obeisance (Esther 7:8). They are curious and a bit excited to see what would happen next, which is why they rise “early the next morning.”

Scene 3: His head, as well as his two hands were lying on the threshold (v.4)

- This mirrored a common practice performed on the corpses of slain enemies: their heads and hands would be taken as trophies of that military conquest or just cut off and left on the battlefield (1 Sam 17:51; 31:9; 2 Sam 4:12).
- Dagon’s humiliating act of self-abasement was repeated the following morning, a sure sign that the previous day’s events had not been “accidental.” Since the hand was a symbol of power (Judges 6:13; Jeremiah 12:7), God cut them off. Dagon is no longer recognizable because he is headless and handless.

Threshold (v.5): Temple thresholds (Zephaniah 1:4-9) were viewed as entry points into the underworld and treated with care. Since Dagon is face down in the dirt, he was believed to have begun his journey to the underworld, making this threshold especially dangerous. A person stepping on the threshold might put pressure on the heads of the spirits or demons contained in it, and by doing so, irritate them. The spirits were then believed to inflict pain on the offender. In order to avoid this superstitious act, people would step or literally leap over the threshold, which was a practice condemned as pagan by the prophet Zephaniah (1:9). This threshold has now become taboo because the severed head and hands of Dagon landed on it.

2. The Stupidity and Asininity of the Philistines (v.3-7)

- Our culture, similar to the Philistines, continues to worship fallen idols. Three areas of God’s Word that have been under assault: the family, marriage, and sexuality.

3. The Shipment of the Ark between the Philistines (v.8-12)

Where is the glory (4:21)? He is wreaking havoc in the Philistine country. Four categories of judgment where the glory of the LORD is seen:

- Tumors (v.6, 9, 12): this would have been the swelling of lymph glands, especially around the armpits and groins. This was not the bubonic plague. In Ashdod and the surrounding region, the hand of the LORD was heavy (pun intended). At the council, the “lords” voted that the ark be sent to Gath. At Gath, the tumors were more painful, as they broke the surface of the skin. Unlike at Ashdod, the tumors affected both the young and old. The ark was then sent to Ekron, where the hand of God was very heavy (v.12).
- Terror/Fear (v.6, 9, 10, 11): There are two categories of fear in Scripture: Godly fear and everything else.
 - Godly Fear: arises from a humble heart that will produce a righteousness, holiness and godliness that is from above.
 - Ungodly Fear: emerges from a heart that is set on self-preservation at the expense exercising wisdom, trusting God, and walking in faith.
 - Proverbs 9:1; James 3:17 states what is the origin of wisdom and the fruits of it. Godly fear and reverence are central tenants to wisdom.

* Notice the increasing severity of the panic or the outbreak. It was called “great” (v.6), “exceedingly great” (v.9) and finally “exceedingly heavy” (v.11). Dagon’s hands were cut off, yet the LORD’s hand was heavy upon the Philistines. The LORD’s hand is mentioned four times (5:6,7,9,11) in order to emphasize the LORD’s power as opposed to the decapitated and powerless Dagon.
- Death (v.11-12): Death was not mentioned at Ashdod or Gath, but at Ekron, “the men who did not die were struck with tumors....” This indicates a new judgment: death. This death was not caused by panic or fear, but instead judgment.
- Mice (6:4): The mice would have destroyed and ravished the Philistine crop, causing starvation. This would have occurred during the harvest season (6:13).

The men of the city “cried out” (v.12). What kind of cry was this?

- It was a cry out of pain, not repentance. It indicates the severity of the pain, not the sincerity of the heart that would arise from a changed heart.
- The two allusions here would point the Biblicist to Israel crying out to the LORD in Egypt (Exodus 2:23) and Nineveh repenting and crying out to God (Jonah 3:5-8).