

# 1 Samuel 5:1-12: The Heavy Hand of God

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] Again, the passages 1 Samuel 5, 1-12 on page 216. Please stand for the reading of God's word. When the Philistines had captured the Ark of God, they brought it from Ebenezer to Ashdod.

Then the Philistines took the Ark of God and brought it into the house of Dagon and set it up beside Dagon. And when the people of Ashdod rose early the next morning, behold, Dagon had fallen face downward on the ground before the Ark of the Lord.

So they took Dagon and put him back in his place. But when they rose early on the next morning, behold, Dagon had fallen face down on the ground before the Ark of the Lord.

And the head of Dagon, both his hands were lying cut off on the threshold. Only the trunk of Dagon was left to him. This is why the priests of Dagon and all who enter the house of Dagon do not tread on the threshold of Dagon in Ashdod to this day.

The hand of the Lord was heavy against the people of Ashdod, and he terrified and afflicted them with tumors, both Ashdod and its territory. And when the men of Ashdod saw how things were, they said, The Ark of the God of Israel must not remain with us, for his hand is hard against us and against Dagon our God.

[ 1 : 2 3 ] So they sent and gathered together all the lords of the Philistines and said, What shall we do with the Ark of the God of Israel? They answered, Let the Ark of the God of Israel be brought around to Gath.

So they brought the Ark of the God of Israel there. But after they had brought it there, or brought it around, the hand of the Lord was against that city, causing a very great panic, and he afflicted the men of the city, both young and old, so that tumors broke out on them.

So they sent the Ark of God to Ekron. But as soon as the Ark of God came to Ekron, the people of Ekron cried out, They have brought around to us the Ark of the God of Israel to kill us and our people.

They sent, therefore, and gathered together 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, that it may not kill us and our people.

For there was a deathly panic throughout the whole city. The hand of God was very heavy there. The men who did not die were struck with tumors, and the cry of the city went up to heaven.

[ 2 : 2 4 ] This is the word of the Lord. Good afternoon.

It's good to be with you. Good to be able to share from God's word. And if you're like my wife, as I was going over my message on last night, she was wondering, what are you going to do with that text?

Barak has already prophesied that it's going to be a long sermon. Well, we're glad to be able to share, and we hope that it is definitely within reason, and that the Lord indeed will take his word, guide it to our hearts, and guide our actions.

We left 1 Samuel chapter 4 on last week, And the reader, as he emerges from 1 Samuel chapter 4, is stunned, sobered, saddened, and really embarrassed for God's people.

Their strategy for victory had failed. They had brought the ark of God into the battle as a good luck charm, and it did not work.

[ 4 : 00 ] Rather than bringing them victory, Israhel had been greatly humbled and shamed and defeated by the Philistines.

Anybody here on this afternoon know anything about being humbled, shamed, defeated yet again by those age-old kind of enemies that have a way of coming around again and again?

The chapter before us allows us to follow the ark of God into Philistine territory. The Philistines had something to learn from the ark residing with them.

They would learn that a victory over a compromised people, that's Israel, is not the same as a victory over the Lord himself.

It was a needed lesson, and a lesson that would be learned the hard way. Often our conduct, the way that we live, can cause people to get the wrong idea about our God, the God we claim.

[ 5 : 26 ] When we honor him fully, he has a better chance of being honored by others. When we don't honor him, they give themselves an excuse to write him off.

Notice in verses 1 through 5 in our text today, God's power we see there over the Philistine deity. The supremacy of God is seen in the humiliation of Dagon, check this out, in his own temple, huh?

One may have thought that Dagon may have had a little home-field advantage, but he didn't, huh? In chapter 5, the ark of God comes center stage in the narrative.

You might say it's been working its way in, and here it is, center stage in chapter 5. It had been brought from Shiloh, you see that in chapter 4, verse 4, from Shiloh to Ebenezer, into the battle.

And then to Ashdod, chapter 5, verse 1. Ashdod was one of the principal cities of the Philistines. And according to chapter 5, verse 2, it was then brought to the house of Dagon, the chief god of the Philistines, and placed right up there next to his image.

[ 6 : 57 ] Think about that in your mind, huh? Dagon, huh? His name is associated with the Hebrew word for grain. And he was supposedly the fertility god, the one responsible for making things grow.

He was worshipped not only in Philistia, but in other places in the ancient Near East. And in Judges chapter 16, we see that this was the Philistine god that they gave credit for capturing Samson, delivering Samson into their hands.

We see that in chapter 16, in verse 23. And Ashdod, and here we have here, the captured ark of God was placed in the house of Dagon, besides Dagon, and he was placed there as an inferior captured deity.

Brought in, you might say, he was somewhat of an auxiliary deity, if you please. In the ancient Near East, this was the way that victorious armies operated. They would take the gods of the defeated armies and place them in the temples of their gods, and they would be viewed as inferior or subordinate to their particular deity.

So that's the scene that you have there, house of Dagon, the image of Dagon, and then the ark of God placed there beside it. The image of the defeated deity, you might even say, was put in the temple as a trophy of war.

[ 8 : 32 ] In the minds of the Philistines, the God of Israel had been taken as a prisoner of war. If we felt bad about the defeat of the Israelites in chapter 4, this causes us to be humored and really sort of nervous for the Philistines because, wow, look at the way they're treating the awesome God of Israel.

We're nervous for them at this point. They really don't know who it is that they're actually dealing with, and their folly, their foolishness would eventually cost them very dearly.

Look at the verses before us. Look in verse 3. And when the people of Ashdod rose early, the next day, behold, Dagon had fallen face downward and on the ground before the Ark of the Lord, so they took Dagon and put him back in his place.

Here's a really a fair question that could be asked. Who, in fact, was the real prisoner in this particular scenario?

God's people had been defeated on the battlefield, and the Ark of God was in enemy hands. But the confident Philistines at this point would soon to see that it was really Dagon and his followers who were the real prisoners.

[ 10 : 12 ] And Ashdod, they had not come face to face, not with the frail human warriors who had been compromised and they were covenant-breaking human army of the living God.

This wasn't Israel on the battlefield. The real opponent here was the real divine warrior himself, huh?

The Lord of hosts, Yahweh Sabaoth. And we see him introduced in 1 Samuel chapter 1 verse 3 as that. That pictures him as the commander-in-chief of all the hosts in all of the universe.

You remember Luther mentions it in a mighty fortress is our God. Lord Sabaoth, his name, from age to age the same, and he will what?

He will win the battle. Huh? He's the God of the universe. He is the one without limitations who has all things at his disposal, and controls all things.

[ 11 : 19 ] The divine warrior is the one that they came face to face or Dagon had come face to face with in his temple. Huh? Hannah had already spoken of the Lord's uniqueness, remember?

Here are words again from 1 Samuel chapter 2 verses 2 and 3. This is what she said. There's none holy like the Lord. There is none beside you.

There is no rock like our God. Talk no more very proudly. Let not arrogance come out of your mouth for the Lord is a God of knowledge and by him actions await.

Huh? That's the God that they were dealing with in Philistia. Huh? Far from being subordinate, the supremacy of the Lord comes clearly into view in the temple of Dagon.

No home field advantage for Dagon. There's a sense in which Dagon really is put in his place in his own house face down before the ark of God.

[ 12 : 29 ] The ark, the God of the whole earth has no equal. The Philistines should have taken clues clues from their revered deity on his face before the ark of God.

In that regard, friends, so should we. Huh? Fall down before him. Love and adore him.

Huh? What a posture. Not only for the enemies of God but for those of us who are a part of his family. Picture what happens next.

It's quite amusing. very amusing. People come in, they see Dagon out of his place and then here they are putting this image of their deity back in place.

Here the one who was being celebrated as victor as being lifted up and put back in place by his humble servants. What a sad picture.

[ 13 : 32 ] Matter of fact, turn over with me to Isaiah chapter 44. just want to give you a glimpse because Isaiah joins in scripture's mockery of idols or so-called deities.

Chapter 44 and begin at verse 8b, the last part of it. Is there a God besides me?

There is no rock. I know not any. Verse 9. All who fashion idols are nothing and the things they delight in do not profit. Their witnesses neither see nor know that they may be put to shame.

Who fashions a God or cast an idol that is profitable for nothing? Behold, all his companions shall be put to shame and the craftsmen are only human.

Let them all assemble. Let them all stand forth. Let them be terrified. They shall be put to shame together. And notice what he goes in verse 12. The iron smith takes a cutting tool and works it over the coals.

[ 14 : 42 ] He fashions it with hammers and works it with his strong arm. He becomes angry and his strength fails. He drinks water and is not faint. No water and is faint.

Look at verse 12. The carpenter gets in the act of creating these idol images. The carpenter stretches a line. He marks it out with a pencil. He shapes it with planes and marks it with a compass.

He shapes it into the figure of a man and with the beauty of a man to dwell in a house. And it goes on down and down and down this mockery of these idol so-called deities that people made with their hands.

So back to chapter five. Things got worse in Ashdod when they got up the next day not only was Dagon face down again Dagon was without head and without hands only his torso remained.

One of the exercises in ancient warfare was to cut off the hands and the heads of their enemies. These were battlefield trophies.

[ 15 : 53 ] You may recall in victory later on you see it in 1 Samuel chapter 17 you remember when David defeated the giant Goliath what happened? Cut off his head.

Saul King Saul's head would later be a trophy in the temple of Dagon 1 Chronicles chapter 10 verse 10 but here you have the headless handless useless Dagon one would think that the people would have gotten the message the supremacy of the Lord was seen in the feet of Dagon on his own turf Dagon was no match for almighty God notice in verse 5 this is why the priest of Dagon and all who enter the house of Dagon do not tread on the threshold of Dagon in Ashdod to this day the response of the priest to the defeat or this particular incident they considered the place where Dagon's head had rolled and his hands had landed they treated it as sacred space what was really going on in Philistia like the

Trojan horse in Greek mythology so here in their arrogant folly they had allowed the enemy into their camp and their God was defeated on his own turf what does this passage help us to see that the God of heaven is not a pushover who can be manipulated by friend Israel or foe the Philistines he's not a pushover who can be manipulated by his own people enforced to do something that their character and their covenant compromise situation did not warrant but nor is he a pushover for the foes that he can be easily manipulated either he deals wisely and powerfully with both of those entities the defeat of

God's people chapter 4 must not be equated with the weakness of their God and this passage helps us to see this very thing he is able to defend his honor he is able to defend his reputation a victory over God's people is not the same as victory over the Lord himself and when listen to this friends when God's people when you and I are weakened through compromise and thereby defeated people can get the wrong impression about the God we serve and thus we must not allow that to happen may we find ourselves faithful and not weakened by compromise through our disobedience to God those who are weakened through compromise and this includes you and me we are ripe for defeat when we dabble and dabble and then still feel that we can have the favor in the hand of

God oh that's dangerous territory to be on perhaps living a double life presenting one thing in one particular venue or arena and living something else beside that we're ripe for defeat when you and I compromise through disobedience in verses 1-5 we notice that God's power over the Philistine deity but in verses 6-12 we see God's power over the Philistine people the Lord's primacy is seen in the affliction of the Philistine people in their own land oh it's not just on the battlefield or in the temple but God is the Lord of the whole earth and defeated them on their own territory look at verse 6 according to verse 6 the battle was not simply against an inanimate stone wood or metal object that is

[ 20:11 ] Dagon in the temple the Lord had a clear message that he wanted to spread in Philistia look at verse 6 the hand of the Lord notice this key term and we'll see it the hand of the Lord was heavy against the people of Ashdod and he terrified and afflicted them with tumors both Ashdod and its territory notice we know how there are various ways in which you and I can use our hands we can use our hands in an affectionate way and we can use our hands in opposing kind of ways and that's the hand the kind of usage that we see in this particular text he had a clear message that he wanted to send the visible inanimate useless hands of Dagon had been severed but the invisible hand of the Lord was heavy in Ashdod and the impotence and inactivity and the defenselessness of Dagon are contrasted with the dynamic activity and power of the living

God this is clear from what we see in the verses as a matter of fact we've read one verse 6 that mentions the hand of the Lord look at verse 7 and when the men of Ashdod saw how things were they said the ark of the God of Israel must not remain with us notice here for his hand is hard against us and against Dagon our God look at verse 9 but after they had brought it around the hand of the Lord was what against the city causing a great panic and he afflicted the men of the city both young and old so that tumors broke out on them so it was not just against the inanimate Dagon it was against the very people the Philistines themselves look at verse 11 where we see it one more time in this particular text they sent therefore and gathered together 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 that it may not kill us and our people for there was a deathly panic throughout the whole city and here it is the hand of God was very heavy there wow let me ask you on this afternoon have you felt the tender caring loving hand of

God sure you have we all he's his his his bounties are are vast and endless and we felt his tender care in so many ways but on the other hand we felt the heavy chastening disciplining hand of God and have you acknowledged that perhaps in fact that is what is going on in my life or my situation so look at verse 6 one more thing we want to we see our word heavy again don't we've seen it before the idea is that of weightiness it can be in a good sense but here it's in a negative sense and again we see the various verses that speak of the activity of God the ark traveled again center stage from Ashdod verse 6 to Gath verse 8 these are the other of the principal cities in the

Philistine territory there were five of them five lords of the Philistines five rulers in these principal cities but everywhere that the ark went the hand of God was against the inhabitants of the city the passage speaks of tumors affecting the young men and the old men and a couple of things could have been in play tumors in the groin area is a possible rendering an outbreak you see there in verse 9 and this was a common symptom of the bubonic plague that was spread by rodents and in chapter 6 you will see this even more some believe that these men were stricken by hemorrhoids another viable idea is that consistent with what is happening is that the fertility is being foiled Dagon is a fertility God God is right really striking him it is this anti-fertility kind of measures that God is executing there in

Philistia the God of fertility any way you slice it God was at work in the land of the Philistines several years ago at our men's retreat I became a fan of Jason Bourne in this series you know the trilogy the identity supremacy and what's the last one ultimatum yeah that's it but anyway Jason Bourne is this dedicated soldier who wanted to serve his country well and he has gotten manipulated into signing on to a mission that he eventually rejects he doesn't want to be a part of this kind of mission anymore so in the Bourne ultimatum there are some scenes in London where this government team is they have these people under surveillance

[ 25 : 44 ] Bourne and this particular reporter and of course Jason Bourne is doing his thing he is I mean he's just sort of having his way with these guys just defeating them but the forces they close in on him and again he's doing his thing in heavy opposition the cameras are picking up on the action and the chief said what's going on here huh Bourne is outwitted and defeated them again and then he answers his own question it's Jason Bourne and he's picking us apart huh that's what was going on in this particular text the same God who had humbled the idol in the temple he extends his activity to the Philistine cities and he's literally he's picking the Philistines apart huh the supremacy of God the Lord of all the earth is seen in the humiliation of Dagon in the temple huh the supremacy of God is seen in the affliction of the

Philippian people in their own land huh so what's all of this have to do with us today huh the songwriters and scriptures say it so very well first chronicles 1625 for great is the Lord who is greatly to be praised and to be held in all above all gods for great is the Lord a great king above all gods is the word of the songwriter in psalm 95 huh for I know that the Lord is great and that our God is above all gods huh psalm 135 now while there are no explicit commands in this particular text the message is consistent with what we find elsewhere in scripture for you and me thou shalt have no other gods before me huh while being educated demands open-mindedness if your object of worship and dedication and veneration and submission is anyone or anything less than the

God of victory that you see in this particular text you need to change huh and I exhort you to give your allegiance your life only to him to do anything less huh then in a sense what Dagon did falling on our knees before him huh lends itself to eventual and ultimate defeat passages like this and hopefully this was the case for the original readers will help you and me to renew our faith in the almighty that was the potential then and so it is now it's a reminder of God's supremacy and the folly of not recognizing it huh hopefully it calls them once again to stand in awe of the God of the whole earth and to renew their faith in him but there's something else that's here friends the large victory that we see here foreshadows the victory of the Lord

Jesus himself what appeared to be a climactic defeat was transformed into a stunning victory the one who appeared to be defeated was the one who literally picked the enemy apart Paul put it like this way in Colossians he disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to an open shame by triumphing over them in him or in his cross so the work of Jesus looked as if he was defeated but rose victorious ascended on high and may those of us who live on this side of the cross be reminded again of the ultimate supremacy of Christ and may you and I live in ways that he is honored as king because of our uncompromising allegiance to him and to his agenda in the world and because of our commitments friends may those who are prone to bow the knee to anti-god objects and anti-god ideas and anti-god lifestyles may they rethink their ways and bow their knees to Jesus

Christ who himself is Lord alone and Lord of all won't you pray with me father thank you so much for this glimpse into what's what's going on in the temple of Dagon but the territory of the Philistines and how Lord you showed yourself to be strong and and not bound by place or by people but in your own sovereign will and in your own sovereign way Lord you demonstrated your might and your power and your lordship oh God may we see that and may we respond to that in ways Lord that position us well as well as your glory and honor unto you is my prayer in Christ's name amen and