

The Lord Redeems Through Reversal

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[0 : 0 0] 5. When the Philistines captured the Ark of God, they brought it from Ebenezer to Ashdod. And then the Philistines took the Ark of God and brought it into the house of Dagon and set it up before Dagon, beside Dagon. And when the people of Ashdod rose early the next day, 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 downward on the ground before the Ark of the Lord. And the head of Dagon and 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.

This is the word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God. You may be seated. Isaiah 40 tells us that the grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of the Lord stands forever. And in Luke 1, we have this glorious pronouncement that no word from God shall be void of power. Would you pray with me?

Lord, we praise you that you have revealed your power. You've entered human history in time and space, and you've acted in power to reveal who you are. We thank you for how your actions in history have been preserved in your word, inspired by the Holy Spirit, breathed out. We pray that your same Holy Spirit, Lord, who recorded and preserved your written word will now breathe it out with power. The word of God, the gospel, a shadow of Jesus Christ, our Savior. And we pray, Lord, by your Holy Spirit, that you will work mightily in our lives. Free those from bondage, Lord. Demolish the idols. Set the captives free.

For your glory we pray. Amen. Amen. Well, we all have things in our life that are broken or messed up. And as human beings, we often try to make things right through disposal. It was a man named Guy Finley who said nothing in the universe can stop you from letting go and starting over. Try to make pancakes. You taste the first bite and it tastes more like dog biscuits, trash it. We're eating cereal. But the Lord does not let go of his people. He doesn't make things right through disposal. He never throws in the trash his plans to just start all over.

Because he is holy, because he is gracious, the Lord redeems through reversal. Would you turn back a page or two to 1 Samuel chapter 2?

[3 : 4 1] As we work through this wonderful book, I see more and more how this poem prayer by Hannah really sets out the program for the entire story of redemption.

1 Samuel chapter 2 verse 6. Listen to this wonderful couplet of reversal. The Lord brings down to Sheol to hell, then raises up.

The Lord brings down to Sheol to hell, then raises up. That's what the Lord does. He redeems through reversal. And these first five verses of 1 Samuel chapter 5 are a wonderful demonstration of this.

So I want to show you at least three ways in which God redeems through reversal. The first is that the covenant keeper suffers the curse for covenant breakers.

The covenant keeper suffers the curse that covenant breakers deserve. What a glorious, gracious reversal. The Lord of hosts, he was and he is the king of his people.

[4 : 52] But as we've seen as the theme so far, everyone did what seemed right in their own eyes. They don't heed or obey the voice of the Lord. They lived as if there were no king in the land.

And what's the curse upon those who do not obey the voice of the Lord? Deuteronomy 18.15 says, It shall come to pass if you do not obey the voice of the Lord, your God, to observe carefully all his commandments and his statutes, which I command you today, that all these curses will come upon you.

They will overtake you and you shall become an astonishment, a proverb and a byword among all the nations where the Lord will drive you out.

You see, the covenant between God and his people, it has sanctions, blessings for obedience, curses for disobedience.

You disobey God, you will be banished from the land. You will be exiled. The Lord himself will drive you out among all the other nations.

[5 : 59] That's the curse for not listening and obeying the voice of the Lord. Israel is the covenant people of God who don't keep his law.

They are the covenant breakers. But remember, once a year on the Day of Atonement, they would gather around the tent of meeting. And at the heart of their worship service was the Ark of the Covenant, sprinkled in the blood of a substitute lamb.

What's inside that Ark? Two copies. Of the Ten Commandments. The Ark of the Covenant of the Presence of God keeps God's own law.

And the blood sprinkled shows that God will still graciously forgive their sins, cover over their sins by the blood of a perfect lamb. In the Ark, God's law was kept.

The Ark of the Covenant-keeping Lord. So reversal number one is this. Rather than sending Israel into exile for breaking the covenant, God, represented by his Ark, the Ark of his presence, God himself goes into exile.

[7 : 16] We read at the very end of the previous chapter, the glory of God left Israel when the Ark was carried away. The presence of God, the presence of God with his people, has departed.

The Ark has been captured. Now look at how 1 Samuel chapter 5 starts off. Verse 1. Then the Philistines, all these other nations.

They took the Ark of the Covenant-keeping. They took the Ark of God. Carried it from Israel, from Ebenezer in Israel, all the way to Ashdod, one of their five powerful Philistine pagan cities.

You see how it's God himself being exiled. The Lord allowed his name to be shamed. The Ark of his presence was hauled off like a slave into exile.

He did not lower the stakes of his covenant. Instead, God justly served those own terms himself. He took the curse and the negative sanctions of covenant-breaking upon himself.

[8 : 27] He was carried away captive, quietly. No mighty display of power in this story. One simple sentence, the Ark of the Lord carried away.

Like a lamb to the slaughter. Because God is holy. God is pure. The covenant-keeper, by his own eternal decree to reveal his grace, takes the curse for covenant-breakers.

The second reversal is that the Holy Creator is humiliated in the house of a statue made by human hands.

The Holy Creator is the Holy Creator. The Holy Creator of all. Who is eternal, infinite, outside of time and space. From whose word all things came into being.

This God humiliated in the house of a statue on earth. In verse 2 we read that when the Philistines took the Ark of God, they brought it into the house of Dagon.

[9 : 38] And set it by Dagon. Dagon was a false god whose upper half was a man, whose lower half was a fish.

Can you picture a statue like that? Dagon reflected the belief that blessings on earth would come from a false pagan demon god.

That's what these pagan nations believed. They knew no other story of the gospel. And so they associated this statue of Dagon with a good year of harvest in agriculture.

Or fertility where your mothers are having babies and the army is growing because the population is growing. Dagon represented to them good weather that would be favorable for their conditions for survival.

And plenty of rain to make the figs get full of juice. In the tree of their own mythology, Dagon was the father of all other lowercase gods.

[10 : 42] Lowercase g. So we're going to read about Baal, one of the other false gods of this land. Well, Dagon was considered the father of Baal. He was considered the lord of the land.

Now think about this. The Philistines came from the island of Crete, which is in the southern part of Greece. Picture that on the Mediterranean. And they came over in the northern part then of the Middle East would be the Mesopotamia, Tigris and Euphrates River.

And they're bouncing along. They had tried to take Egypt. So what the Philistines do as the sea people is just go everywhere the Mediterranean Sea touches and see where they can invade and take over. Now, because they were successful in this part of the world, which is the land God promised to Israel, that entire coast land.

The Philistines come and they conquer. And they're going to give credit to this false god for allowing them to enter his land and be successful. So every time a new Philistine king would be enthroned, there would be a great ceremony.

And the statue of Dagon would bless the king of the Philistines by by showing you are like my you have divine right to be the king and rule over this because I'm the demon god of this land.

[11 : 51] You have my favor.

And the prince of the prince of the prince of the air. They're living in darkness as children of disobedience under Adam's curse so far banished from God. What chance would they ever have of encountering the true God unless God came to them?

As John Owen put it, they had been carried away by violent impressions from the devil into the service of idols. Satan had worked his dark magic and it had worked on this people.

Satan had the minds and the hearts of this people bound under demonic darkness. And now they've got this big statue that they created with their own hands that they worship as a god.

And there is the devil just watching, laughing and mocking the true God, the creator. We also know from history that the spoils of military conquests were also brought into these ancient pagan temples.

[13 : 25] The spoils would be put on display in front of the statue. And then as the worshipers would come into this temple of a false god, they would be caused to awe and to see the majesty and the might of this Dagon, which gave them another victory in war.

To be very specific, a little bit graphic from the Bible itself. This is where the heads of the conquered kings would be brought in and put on display.

First Chronicles chapter 10 verses 8 and 10 tells us that when King Saul of Israel died, the Philistines took the armor and the head of Saul.

They brought it into the temple of Dagon and they fastened it before Dagon. So the temple of Dagon, it really represented the power center for their entire civilization.

The Lord of hosts was now brought in there as a conquered deity. The king of Israel put on display before the conquering demon of the Philistines.

[14 : 28] He's being mocked as a weak loser. Do you see the descent of the Lord of hosts going lower and lower and lower?

He became the slave to the Philistines in order to then become the great deliverer of his people. The third reversal is that the Lord of hosts reverses it.

He does something incredible and majestic and awesome and gracious. The Lord of hosts turns his own captivity into great victory.

The Lord of hosts turns captivity into victory. Look at verse three. When the people of Ashdod arose early in the morning, there was Dagon fallen on his face to the earth before the ark of the Lord.

So then the Philistine priests come into the temple. They're embarrassed. Oh, this is a coincidence. You know, it's it's probably just an accident. Let's set him back up in its place and give it another 24 hours.

[15 : 44] They couldn't cover up what God was really doing. God was putting this demon false God statue prostrate face down before the ark of the presence of the holy God.

Dagon had bowed down to the creator of all. We read in verse four when they arose early the next morning, there was Dagon again fallen on its face to the ground before the ark of the Lord.

Now, the second time we get even more interesting details. The head of Dagon and both of the hands were broken off on the threshold.

Only Dagon's torso was left of it. Literally, the word for torso is dag, which is like the word for fish.

So only the fish part like the fishtail was left. The statue, the man made part, making a God in their own image, broken, fallen.

[16 : 48] The Lord is showing that he's above all other gods of the nations and he can prove his supremacy in the very place of their greatest power.

Now, children, let me make sure you're catching this scene. You're in this temple to a fake demon God.

And you've got this statue now, upper part man, bottom part fish. The tail stayed back on the stadium there where it was elevated, the platform and everything else fallen down, face down in the ark of the Lord there.

Can you picture that? Now, we read in verse four what broke off when it fell. The hands broke off. And we're told that the head broke as well.

What does that remind you of? Laying before the ark of the presence of God. Scales going up the body.

[17 : 54] No arms slithering on its belly, so to speak. And the head crushed. The ark of the Lord invaded enemy territory.

And crushed the serpent's head. We read in verse five that neither the priests of Dagon nor any who come into Dagon's house tread on the threshold of Dagon in Ashdod to this day.

This temple was once crowded. Now there's only cobwebs. Once full of people dancing and worshipping a demon. Now it's just dust.

Once full of men claiming victory in war. Now just squeaking mice. The Lord shut the doors to another synagogue of Satan.

The Lord decapitated Dagon in his own temple. The Lord of hosts had victory over the serpent. You see how the Lord of hosts turned his own captivity into greatest victory?

[19 : 03] I think that for those of you who have seen the glory of God on display in the person and work of Jesus Christ, you're praising him already for this shadow of the finished work of his son.

I need to make sure no one leaves here today without making this really clear connection. It's the covenant keeper suffering the curse for covenant breakers.

See, because Adam did not keep God's word, just like Israel didn't keep God's word. We were all driven out from God's garden kingdom, just like the Philistines.

That's our default state. We were born into this spiritual captivity away from God. In 1 Corinthians 12, we read that you, church, you know that when you were pagans, you were also led astray to mute idols.

You were also under the spell of Satan. Outside of Christ, you and I would be just as pagan. We'd be carried away by violent impressions from the devil into the service of idols.

[20 : 18] Our hearts would be drawn to this dark magic of demons and the devil would own our minds and our hearts. We would be bound in demonic darkness.

The devil could watch us chasing these idols of our hearts, laughing and mocking God by doing so. Now, notice how the Lord does never know lowers the stakes of his own covenant.

The Lord ensures that his justice is fully served. And how did God do that? Once again, the Lord allowed his name to be shamed, just like the ark of his presence was hauled off into exile as a slave.

It points up to us how God is the ultimate covenant keeper. We sing that he left his father's throne above. Why? So free, so infinite, his grace.

And we see the descent and humiliation of the Lord, both in 1 Samuel 5 and also in the Gospels, going lower and lower and lower. Both the ark and Jesus Christ were carried away, captive, without a show of power.

[21 : 30] Greatest practice of divine restraint. Silent as a lamb to the slaughter. Why did Jesus do this?

He needs to take on the curses of covenant breaking because God is just. Just as the Lord of hosts was mocked by the Philistines as a weak loser in the same way, Jesus Christ.

He became sin. In 2 Corinthians 5:21, he who knew no sin became humiliated, became a picture of scorn and shame and cursedness that we might become his righteousness.

See how the ark was just a shadow. And what God did in 1 Samuel 5, it's pointing to the substance, the work of Jesus Christ.

The ark that kept the Ten Commandments. It was pointing to Jesus Christ, the only one who could keep God's moral law and fulfill all righteousness.

[22 : 37] God represented his covenant with his people in the ark of the covenant, being humiliated before a man-made statue. And then the person of Jesus Christ, the holy creator.

He became humiliated on a cursed cross made by human hands to fulfill his covenant of redemption. We sing that he emptied himself of all but love and bled for Adam's helpless race.

Philippians 2.6, being equal with God, he made himself of no reputation, taking the form of a slave and coming as a man. He humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death on the cross.

In the Apostles' Creed, we confess he descended to hell. Remember Hannah's prayer? The Lord brings down to Sheol all the way to hell and he raises up again.

Ephesians 4.9, he ascended. And what does it mean? But that he also first descended into the lower parts of the earth. And why? Why did Jesus do this?

[23 : 54] Why did our Lord Jesus Christ allow himself to be exiled, cut off, and enslaved? It's because he was turning his humiliation and his captivity into the greatest victory in history.

He descended to hell and made the serpent bow before him. He crushed the devil's head. And he buried the sting of death in its own grave.

1 Peter 5.8, the deceiver, Satan still prowls around, seeking whom he may destroy. But Revelation 23 is fulfilled. Satan can no longer deceive the nations.

The gospel goes out. The people, like the Philistines, believe. All those who Christ redeemed and purchased, when they hear, they believe the gospel. The spirit applies the work of Christ's redemption to every soul that he purchased.

And each one that he purchased, when they hear the gospel, they receive him joyfully. John Flavel put it this way.

[25 : 06] Christ is no half savior. How do you know he will save and sanctify you and present you to God? It's because he will not lose the end of all his sufferings.

To what purpose would his meritorious work be without complete and full application? Upon the ark, covered by the blood of a substitutionary lamb, rested God's mercy seat.

And upon Christ rests God's throne of grace. Jesus Christ, covered in his own precious blood, the lamb of God, our perfect substitute.

You see how the Lord redeems through reversal. The Lord allowed himself to be exiled, cut off, and enslaved. In order that he would invade hell, disarm the deceiver, and set all of his captives free.

So when we sing these wonderful hymns and psalms and spiritual songs, these are victory anthems celebrating the work of Jesus Christ. He who makes the many righteous brings us back to life again.

[26 : 26] Dying, he reversed the curse. Then rising, crushed the serpent's head. From beginning to end, Christ the story, his the glory.

Hallelujah. Amen. Philippians 2, 9 and 10. Having finished his work, therefore God also has highly exalted him and given him the name, which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus, every knee should bow, of those in heaven and of those on earth and of those under the earth, that at the name of Jesus, every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is the Lord to the glory of God, the Father.

God be glorified because he redeems through reversal. Tis mercy all, immense and free. O praise my God, it reaches me.

If you see his glorious redemption in Jesus, then receive him with joy and rest in him. Praise him that it has reached you.

May he be glorified in our lives. Amen. Let's pray in response.