

Bible Study November 1, 2023

1 SAUMUEL 5 (AMPLIFIED VERSION)

Capture of the Ark Provokes God

1 Then the Philistines took the ark of God, and they brought it from Ebenezer to Ashdod. 2 They took the ark of God and brought it into the house of Dagon and set it beside [the image of] Dagon [their chief idol]. 3 When the people of Ashdod got up early the next day, behold, Dagon had fallen on his face on the ground before the ark of the LORD. So they took Dagon and returned him to his place. 4 But when they got up early the next morning, behold, Dagon had [again] fallen on his face on the ground before the ark of the LORD, and his head and both palms of his hands were [lying] cut off on the threshold; only the trunk [portion] of [the idol of] Dagon was left on him. 5 This is the reason neither the priests of Dagon nor any who enter Dagon's house step on the threshold of Dagon in Ashdod to this day.

6 Then the hand of the LORD was heavy on the people of Ashdod, and He caused them to be dumbfounded and struck them with tumors, both Ashdod and its territory. 7 When the men of Ashdod saw what had happened, they said, "The ark of the God of Israel must not remain with us, for His hand is heavy on us and on Dagon our god."

Although the Philistines had just witnessed a great victory by Israel's God over their god Dagon, they didn't act upon that insight until they were afflicted with tumors (possibly in connection with bubonic plague). Similarly, today many people don't respond to biblical truth until they experience pain. Are you willing to listen to God for truth's sake, or do you turn to him only when you are hurting?

The Philistines thought they had defeated God because they had beaten Israel and captured the Ark. They soon learned that no one defeats God. Their sweet victory turned sour as God began to destroy them with a plague.

8 So they sent word and gathered all the lords (governors) of the Philistines to them 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 took the ark of the God of Israel there.

The Philistines were governed by five rulers. Each ruler had authority over a different city—Gath, Ekron, Ashdod, Ashkelon, and Gaza. The Ark was taken to three of these capital cities, and each time it brought great trouble and chaos to the citizens.

9 But it happened that after they had taken it to Gath, the hand of the LORD was against the city, causing an extremely great panic [because of the deaths from the plague], for He struck the people of the city, both young and old, and tumors broke out on them. 10 So they sent the ark of God to Ekron. And as the ark of God came to Ekron, the Ekronites cried out, "They have brought the ark of the God of Israel [from Gath] to us, to kill us and our people." 11 So they sent word and gathered all the lords of the Philistines and said, "Send away the ark of the God of Israel; let it be returned 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 (severe) there. ¹² The men who had not died were stricken with tumors and the cry of the city [for help] went up to heaven.

Dagon was the chief god of the Philistines, and they believed he helped them in battle and sent rain to assure bountiful harvests. Why did the Philistines place the Ark in Dagon’s temple? The Philistines believed that the Ark represented the power and presence of the God of Israel. They thought that by taking the Ark into Dagon’s temple, they were taking control of Israel’s God and proving that Dagon was superior. The Philistines should have immediately started to doubt their assumptions, since the great idol of Dagon fell down in front of the Ark several days in a row. It wasn’t until the people living nearby began to get sick and die that the Philistines realized for certain that the Ark represented a source of power greater than they had ever seen—a power that even their god Dagon could not control.