

Supremacy

Session 4 • 1 Samuel 5:1-10; 6:13-15,19-20

ENGAGE

PREPARE: Display **Pack Item 2** (*Poster: Outline of 1 Samuel*). Make copies of **Pack Item 10** (*Handout: Dagon*). Enlist a volunteer to give a summary report of **Pack Item 10**.

READ: Read the opening paragraph on page 37. Lead a brief discussion on any experiences adults have had with kudzu or a similar invasive plant or animal species.

ASK: **What recent purchase have you made that left you disappointed?** (p. 37)

INTRODUCE: Point to **Pack Item 2** (*Poster: Outline of 1 Samuel*). Explain that today's Bible study is part of the section known as "The Ark Narrative." Using content from **Understand the Context** (p. 37), explain the significance of the ark for Israel.

CONTEXT: Share that today's lesson will examine how God demonstrated His power through the ark, even though both the Israelites and the Philistines handled it improperly.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

READ: **Ask a volunteer to read aloud 1 Samuel 5:1-5** while adults listen for what happened to the ark of God and what happened in the temple of Dagon. Guide adults to summarize the events described in the verses.

REPORT: Distribute copies of **Pack Item 10** (*Handout: Dagon*). Call on the enlisted volunteer to overview the article. Encourage the group to read and reflect on the article in greater depth during the week.

EXPLAIN: Read aloud 1 Samuel 5:3 again and summarize this information:

- **(5:3)** Dagon was the chief god of the Philistines. By placing the ark in Dagon's temple, the Philistines were attributing their victory over Israel to him, interpreting their success as proof that Dagon was greater than the God of Israel. The imagery in verse 3 is striking. To be face down on the ground signified submission and weakness. That Dagon's statue was found in this posture before the ark of the Lord highlighted the inability of this false god to stand against Yahweh. Adding to this picture of helplessness, Dagon had to be lifted back into place by those who served him—something he clearly could not do for himself.

HIGHLIGHT: Encourage adults to recall what happened the second night in the temple of Dagon (v. 4). Discuss the message God

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communicated through the hands and head of Dagon.

- **(5:4)** *In ancient warfare, often the head and the hands were cut off as trophies of victory. For example, the writer of 1 Samuel later used the same wording to describe David removing Goliath's head (1 Sam. 17:51). Just as David executed Goliath, so God "executed" His pagan rival in its own temple. This served as a demonstration of the ultimate power of the Lord God of Israel.*

ASK: What lesser "god" in your life needs to be toppled over? (p. 39)

READ: Ask a volunteer to read aloud 1 Samuel 5:6-10 as adults listen for how the residents of Ashdod, Gath, and Ekron responded to the presence of the ark of God.

LIST: On the board, draw four columns: *Ashdod, Gath, Ekron*, and *God*. Direct adults to call out what each Philistine city said and did. Record their responses in the corresponding columns. For the fourth column, ask adults to add what the Lord did in each of the towns. Record responses under *God*.

ASK: Why did the Lord bring judgment on the Philistines in Ashdod and Gath? (p. 39)

RECAP: Share more details about God's judgment on the Philistines:

- **(5:9)** *The contrast is unmistakable: Dagon's hands were gone, but the Lord's hand remained strong. His "heavy" hand signified ongoing pressure against the Philistines. The term translated "terrified" suggests more than fear. Some translations say He "ravaged them." Ashdod and its surrounding areas were ruined and made desolate. Scholars debate the nature of the tumors, proposing possibilities such as hemorrhoids, boils, or lymphatic swelling—the last pointing to bubonic plague.*

FOLLOW UP: Emphasize the serious nature of God's judgment. Note Ekron's reaction to the ark when the Philistines tried to move it there.

ASK: Why do you think God brought such heavy punishment on the Philistines? What do God's actions reveal about His character? (p. 39)

God's Holiness

Learn more about God's holiness and how we are to show proper reverence for Him.

READ: Ask a volunteer to read aloud 1 Samuel 6:13-15 while other adults note of what the people of Beth-shemesh did with the ark of God.

- **(5:13-15)** Throughout this incident, the regulations regarding the ark of the Lord were violated. Although the Philistines were unaware of God's laws, the ark was always to be carried, not transported on a cart (Num. 4:15; 7:9). This violation would receive harsh judgment from God years later (2 Sam. 6:1-11). The ark was loaded onto a large rock. Here, too, God's directions were violated. The ark was to remain hidden from public display. The Levites should have covered the ark (see Num. 4:4-6).

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ASK: **What would you expect to happen in response to the people's actions in verses 13-15? Why?** (p. 39)

READ: **Read aloud 1 Samuel 6:19-20** and ask adults to compare what actually happened to what they expected.

EXPLAIN: Highlight God's response to the violation of His holiness by the residents of Beth-shemesh:

- **(5:19)** *God had commanded that the ark be covered whenever it was removed from the holy of holies, and only Aaron and his sons were permitted to see it (Num. 4:1-20). Instead, the people openly displayed it and even looked inside, allowing curiosity to override the reverence they should have shown. As a result, God judged them, and their joy quickly turned to grief.*

SHARE: Note that the residents of Beth-shemesh had a similar response to the Philistines once they experienced God's wrath. Point out that they moved the ark about fifteen miles to the town of Kiriath-jearim and that it remained there for twenty years. Explain that many scholars believe the ark could not return to Shiloh because the tabernacle had been destroyed by the Philistines.

ASK: **In what ways might we be guilty of trivializing that which is holy?** (p. 39)

CHALLENGE

SUMMARIZE: Review these points from this week's Bible study passage:

- We can be assured that God is the only true God.
- We should recognize that God will judge our sin.
- We can enter into the presence of God only in the way He has prescribed.

DISCUSS: Guide adults to respond to the **Apply the Text** question on page 39. Encourage them to list ways they can show reverence for the things of God in their lives. Record their responses on the board. Challenge them to identify at least one practical step they will take in the week to come.

PRAY: Direct a volunteer to read Psalm 97:9. Point out that this is the memory verse for the week. Lead adults to use this verse as a prayer back to God. After a few minutes, close the session in prayer, asking God to help adults identify the false gods in their lives and to follow God with all their hearts.

AFTER THE SESSION

Follow up the session with an email, text, or note to adults who attended the session. Encourage them to continue approaching the Lord in reverent prayer and identifying areas where their reverence is lacking. Remind them God is holy and worthy of our sole devotion.

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