SESSION 4

Supremacy

GOD MANIFESTED HIS POWER BEFORE THE PHILISTINES.

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

5:1 After the Philistines had captured the **ark of God,** A they
took it from Ebenezer to **Ashdod,** B 2 brought it into the temple
of **Dagon** C and placed it next to his statue. 3 When the people
of Ashdod got up early the next morning, there was Dagon, fallen
with his face to the ground D 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, there was Dagon,
fallen with his face to the ground before the ark of the LORD.
This time, Dagon's head and both of his hands were **broken
off** E and lying on the threshold. Only Dagon's torso remained.
5 That is why, still today, the priests of Dagon and everyone who
enters the temple of Dagon in Ashdod do not step on Dagon's
threshold. 6 **The LORD's hand was heavy** F on the people of
Ashdod. He terrified the people of Ashdod and its territory and
afflicted them with **tumors.** G 7 When the people of Ashdod
saw what was happening, they said, "The ark of Israel's God
must not stay here with us, because his hand is strongly against
us and our god Dagon." 8 So they called all the Philistine rulers
together and asked, "What should we do with the ark of Israel's
God?" "The ark of Israel's God should be **moved to Gath,**" H
they replied. So they moved the ark of Israel's God. 9 After they
had moved it, the LORD's hand was against the city of Gath,
causing a great panic. He afflicted the people of the city, from
the youngest to the oldest, with an outbreak of tumors. 10 The
people of Gath then sent the ark of God to Ekron, but when it
got there, the Ekronites cried out, "They've moved the ark of
Israel's God to us to kill us and our people!" [. . .] 6:13 The
people of **Beth-shemesh** I were harvesting wheat in the valley,
and when they looked up and saw the ark, they were overjoyed
to see it. 14 The cart came to the field of Joshua of Beth-shemesh
and stopped there near a large rock. The people of the city
chopped up the cart and offered the cows as a **burnt offering** J
to the LORD. 15 The Levites removed the ark of the LORD, along
with the box containing the gold objects, and placed them on the
large rock. That day the people of Beth-shemesh offered burnt
offerings and made sacrifices to the LORD. [. . .] 19 God **struck
down** K the people of Beth-shemesh because they looked
inside the ark of the LORD. He struck down seventy persons.
The people mourned because the LORD struck them with a great
slaughter. 20 The people of Beth-shemesh asked, "Who is able
to stand in the presence of the LORD this holy God? **To whom
should the ark go** L from here?"

Exploring Key Words

A The gold-covered box that signified God's presence among His people (Ex. 25:10-22).

B One of five major Philistine cities. Ashdod was about thirty to forty miles from the battlefield in Ebenezer and was home of the temple to Dagon.

C The primary god of the Philistines. Many scholars believe his statue was half-man and half-fish.

D The Philistines believed Dagon was superior to Israel's God and had defeated Him when they defeated the Israelites. However, the false idol was found bowing before the Lord.

E The second day, Dagon was both bowing and broken before God. This proved the events of the day before were not an accident.

F The Hebrew wording suggests that God was placing a heavy burden on the Philistines to bring glory to Himself.

G God warned that tumors would result from rebelling against Him (Deut. 28:27). God sent a plague against Ashdod as He had Egypt.

H The hometown of Goliath, Gath was about twelve miles south of Ashdod. The location changed, but the plague remained.

I After Ekron refused the ark (5:10), it was sent back to Israel. Beth-shemesh was an Israelite town near the Philistine border.

J Some requirements for a sacrifice were not observed, but the residents of Beth-shemesh celebrated the ark's return.

K The people dishonored God by looking into the ark, and seventy people died (see Num. 4:20).

L Like the Philistines, the people of Beth-shemesh did not want to keep the ark after experiencing God's wrath.

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NOTES

Sovereignty (1 Sam. 5:1-5)

- After winning a military battle against the Israelites, the Philistines captured the ark of the covenant and placed it in the temple of Dagon in Ashdod.
- The following morning, Dagon's image was found face down before the ark. The statue was returned to a standing position, only to be found face down again the next morning.
- This time, its head and hands were broken off and were lying on the threshold.

Judgment (1 Sam. 5:6-10)

- Even as He humiliated Dagon, God also brought devastation on the people of Ashdod, afflicting them with painful tumors. The people called a council of Philistine rulers to determine what to do with the ark.
- The ark was moved to Gath, only to have that city's inhabitants afflicted with tumors as well. Eventually, the Philistines sent the ark to Ekron, causing panic among the people there.

Reverence (1 Sam. 6:13-15,19-20)

- After seven months, the Philistines decided to send the ark back to the Israelites with a guilt offering. A new cart was prepared with two cows, the ark of the covenant, and the guilt offering before being sent toward Beth-shemesh (6:1-12).
- While harvesting wheat, the people of Beth-shemesh saw the cart carrying the ark of the covenant and rejoiced. They chopped up the cart and offered the cows as burnt offerings to the Lord.
- However, God struck down seventy people because they had acted irreverently and looked inside the ark (see Num. 4:5-6).

Summary Statements

God manifested His power before the Philistines.

- 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.

Memory Verse

Psalm 97:9

Key Doctrine

God

There is one and only one living and true God. (See Isaiah 40:25; John 17:3.)

For additional commentary, see the Leader Guide or Adult Commentary, available for purchase at **goExploreTheBible.com.**

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ENGAGE

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

- Native to China and Japan, kudzu was introduced to America in the 1870s. Admired for its beauty, it was used for shade and promoted to prevent soil erosion. However, the Southeast's heat and humidity allowed it to thrive, growing up to a foot a day.
- Kudzu blocks sunlight, kills other plants, damages power lines, and engulfs buildings and forests. It causes millions of dollars in damage each year and has become known as "the vine that ate the South."
- Sometimes, events and circumstances feel like they are going to dominate our lives. That's when we have to remember that God reigns supreme in every area. Nothing is greater than His love and His power.

Bonus: What are some things that would take over your life if you allowed them?

EXPLORE

SOVEREIGNTY (1 SAM. 5:1-5)

Bonus: Who are some powerful people today? From where do they derive their authority?

- In two battles against the Philistines, the Israelites lost 34,000 men (1 Sam. 4:1-11). The Philistines also captured the ark of the covenant and took it to Ashdod.
- Putting the ark in Dagon's temple symbolized their belief that their god was greater than Israel's God. It also meant the Philistines credited Dagon with their victory.
- However, the tables soon turned. The next day, the Philistines found the image of Dagon facedown, bowing to the ark. The statue being in that position underscored this false deity's powerlessness before the one, true God.
- The next day, they found Dagon on the ground again, this time with his hands and head broken off. This validated God's power and proved the events of the previous day were not an accident.

***What lesser "god" in your life needs to be toppled over?* (*PSG, p. 40*)**

JUDGMENT (1 SAM. 5:6-10)

Bonus: When have you felt God's hand move in a good way? When have you seen His hand work in judgment?

- Along with humiliating their idol, God also afflicted the residents of Ashdod with painful tumors. The exact nature of the tumors has been the subject of debate. Possible explanations have included everything from hemorrhoids to boils or to lymphatic swelling. This final possibility would have indicated the presence of bubonic plague.
- While Dagon's hands were gone, God's hand was still powerful. In the showdown with the Lord, Dagon had lost decisively. So, the rulers of the Philistines—likely the leaders of the nation's five major cities—decided to move the ark from Ashdod to Gath.
- The Philistines hoped that a change in location would change the results, but the Lord's response was identical in Gath. The word translated "panic" carries the idea of turmoil and confusion. When the Philistines tried to move the ark again, the residents of Ekron refused to accept it. They believed having the ark was a death sentence.

***Why do you think God brought such heavy punishment on the Philistines? What do God's actions reveal about His character?* (*PSG, p. 42*)**

REVERENCE (1 SAM. 6:13-15,19-20)

Bonus: What are some ways people show disrespect in our culture?

- After having the ark for seven months, the Philistines decided to send it back to Israel. Pulled on a cart by two cows, the ark came to Beth-shemesh. The residents there celebrated by making a burnt offering to the Lord.
- However, some residents looked inside the ark, a severe violation of God's law and God's holiness. In response, the Lord struck down seventy people for their lack of reverence. The people in Beth-shemesh eventually sent the ark to Kiriath-jearim, since Shiloh probably had been destroyed during the war with the Philistines.

***In what ways might we be guilty of trivializing that which is holy?* (*PSG, p. 44*)**

CHALLENGE

As a group, discuss what it looks like to honor God's superiority well.

***How can we show proper reverence for the things of God?* (*PSG, p. 45*)**

Encourage adults to examine their lives and to identify any idols that might be hindering their walk with God.

***What actions can you take to make sure the Lord has your sole devotion?* (*PSG, p. 45*)**

FURTHER DISCUSSION

Scan here for additional discussion questions for this week's study.

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BONUS IDEAS

BIBLE SKILL (PSG, P. 44)

Focus on something within the passage to gain a better understanding of its message.

> The ark of the covenant is the central piece in this story of Israel and the Philistines. Increase your knowledge of this sacred object by reading about its construction in Exodus 25:10-22 and 37:1-9. Next, read an article about the ark of the covenant in a Bible dictionary. ***What was to be the attitude of the Israelite people toward the ark of the Lord? What do we learn from the importance of the ark in Judaism that informs our own attitude toward the worship of God?***

Encourage adults to share what they know about the ark of the covenant. Distribute Bible dictionaries and direct them to complete the Bible Skill activity on page 44 of the PSG. After a few minutes, allow adults to share that they learned. Review the questions in the activity to supplement the discussion.

OBJECT LESSON: WRAPPED GIFT

Place a small, wrapped gift in the center of the group. (*NOTE: The gift can be anything you find around your house. The sillier the better.*) Encourage adults to guess what might be in the package. Provide hints as appropriate. After a few minutes, open the gift and show them what is inside.

Ask: ***What is the worst "white elephant" gift you've ever gotten for Christmas? What did you do with it?*** Discuss responses and be prepared to share your own experiences.

Review what happened when the Philistines brought the ark of God into their cities. Point out that they believed they had proven their superiority to Israel and Israel's God, but they discovered their mistake the hard way. Share that what they thought was a gift actually became a plague.

Affirm that God takes His holiness seriously, and He will respond when we put other gods ahead of Him.

DIG DEEPER

GOD VS DAGON

In 1 Samuel 5, the Philistines captured the ark of covenant. Israel had been careless with this sacred item and lost it in a devastating battle. This meant a polytheistic people who did not recognize God were able to take the ark to their own country.

The Philistines understood the ark was associated with God's power. In 1 Samuel 4, they had seen how Israel rallied around the ark, which motivated the Philistines to fight harder. Once God's people fled from the rout, the Philistines capitalized on the opportunity to possess the ark. They wrongly assumed that controlling the ark of the covenant gave them control over the God of the covenant.

Back in their own country, the Philistines placed the ark of God in the temple of Dagon, their primary deity. First Samuel 5:2 notes they put the ark in a submissive position next to Dagon's statue. This was their way of thanking Dagon for the victory over Israel and trying to emphasize his superiority. Plus, the image of Dagon (some think it was half-man and half-fish) likely was much larger than the ark. This might have given them even more confidence in their god's power over the God of Israel.

However, God showed that His power extended well beyond Israel's borders. When the Philistines entered their temple the next day, they were shocked to find the statue of Dagon face down, bowing to the ark! Since their god could not help himself, they restored the statue to its normal spot. But things got even worse for Dagon. When the Philistines entered the temple on the second day, the image was face down in front of the ark again, but its head and hands had been removed from the rest of its body. God proved that the first day's humiliation was no accident.

God also afflicted the Philistines with tumors. The Philistines were no match for God, and He used this occasion to display His glory! Within months, the ark was back on Israelite soil.

BONUS CONTENT

God's Holiness

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

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