

Slide 1

The Lord Will Be Exalted Among The Nations

1 SAMUEL 5:1-6:16

Introduction

1. How do people with whom you go to school, work, interact on a daily basis view the God you serve?
 - a. Is He real to them?
 - b. Is He someone they believe to have all power and control?
 - c. Do they revere Him?
 - d. Are they willing to submit to His authority in their lives?
2. What about you?
 - a. Can those who know you detect a true reverence for God?
 - b. Do they see you as someone who orders your life according to His will?
3. In our study tonight, we will see how God responded to those . . .
 - a. who thought Him to be powerless, and
 - b. who thought the Ark of the Covenant above which His presence dwelt was nothing more than a spoil of battle.
4. As we shall see in tonight's lesson, God did not need someone to take care of Him or to fight His battles.
5. He could fight His own battles, and do so in a persuasive manner.
6. The God you and I serve is worthy of our reverence and our worship.
7. Though He does not need us, He wants us.

Slide 2

I. The Captivity Of The Ark (5:1-12)

A. THE ARK IN THE TEMPLE OF DAGON (VV. 1-6)

“Now the Philistines took the ark of God and brought it from Ebenezer to Ashdod. Then the Philistines took the ark of God and brought it to the house of Dagon and set it by Dagon.” (1 Samuel 5:1–2, NASB95)

1. Ebenezer had been the place of the Israelite encampment before the battle (1 Samuel 4:1).
2. The Philistines took the ark from there to Ashdod, a distance of about thirty miles.
 - a. Ashdod was one of the five principal cities of the Philistines.
 - b. It along with Gaza, Gath, Ekron and Ashkelon were known as the Philistine pentapolis.
3. The Philistine city of Ekron was much closer to Ebenezer than Ashdod.
4. The fact that the ark was taken to Ashdod instead may mean that this is where the temple of Dagon was located.
5. We are not told how the Philistines transported the ark.
 - a. We can only assume that the poles used to carry it were either still in the rings on the sides of the ark or perhaps lying nearby.
 - b. Because of their “great slaughter” of the Israelites they had little respect for this object of the God of the Israelites.
 - c. In those days a god was considered only as powerful as the army of the people who worshipped him.
6. When they reached Ashdod, the Philistines placed the ark inside the temple of Dagon beside the statue of the Philistine god.
7. Dagon had been adopted by the Philistines as their god when they first entered the land around 1200 B.C.
 - a. He is described in Ugaritic texts (from the ancient Mediterranean seaport of Ugarit which flourished from 1450 B.C. to 1200 B.C.) as the father of Baal.

- b. He has been linked by some to words for "grain" and by others to a root meaning "clouds" or "rain".
- c. All of this suggests that Dagon was a fertility god.

Slide 3**8. The first morning (v. 3)**

"When the Ashdodites arose early the next morning, behold, Dagon had fallen on his face to the ground before the ark of the Lord. So they took Dagon and set him in his place again." (1 Samuel 5:3, NASB95)

- a. When the Asdodites came to the temple of Dagon early the next morning, they found the statue of Dagon lying face down on the ground in front of the Ark of the Covenant.
 - 1) The face down position is often mentioned in the Bible as a position of homage or reverence (Abraham, Genesis 17:3; Israelites, Leviticus 9:23-24; Moses & Aaron, Numbers 16:22; 20:6; Joshua, Joshua 5:14; Abigail, 1 Samuel 25:23; Mephibosheth, 2 Samuel 9:6; King Nebuchadnezzar, Daniel 2:46)
 - 2) The implication is that Dagon, the false god of the Philistines, was paying homage to the one true God.
- b. The Ashdodites, supposing that the idol had fallen over by accident, put him back in his place.

Slide 4**9. The second morning (v. 4)**

"But when they arose early the next morning, behold, Dagon had fallen on his face to the ground before the ark of the Lord. And the head of Dagon and both the palms of his hands were cut off on the threshold; only the trunk of Dagon was left to him." (1 Samuel 5:4, NASB95)

- a. When the people of Ashdod came to the temple on the second morning, they found the image of Dagon had again fallen on the ground before the

- Ark.
- b. This time “the head” and “the palms” of both his hands had been *cut off* (תֹּתְרֵב) and were lying on the threshold.
 - c. Only the trunk or body of the idol remained.
 - d. The symbolism presented by Dagon’s fate is interesting:
 - 1) The head typically symbolized authority.
 - a) “For the head of Aram is Damascus and the head of Damascus is Rezin . . . and the head of Ephraim is Samaria and the head of Samaria is the son of Remaliah.” (Isaiah 7:8–9, NASB95)

Slide 5

- b) Decapitation was the ultimate humiliation inflicted in ancient warfare (cf. 1 Samuel 17:51; 31:9)

“Then David ran and stood over the Philistine and took his sword and drew it out of its sheath and killed him, and cut off his head with it. When the Philistines saw that their champion was dead, they fled.”

“They [Philistines] cut off his [Saul’s] head and stripped off his weapons, and sent them throughout the land of the Philistines, to carry the good news to the house of their idols and to the people.”

Slide 6

- 2) The hands were symbolic of power (i.e., Exodus 15:6; Psalm 20:6; 44:3; 63:8; 89:13).

“Your right hand, O Lord, is majestic in power, Your right hand, O Lord, shatters the enemy.” (Exodus 15:6, NASB95)

“Now I know that the Lord saves His anointed; He will answer him from His holy heaven with the saving strength of His right hand.” (Psalm 20:6, NASB95)

“For by their own sword they did not possess the land, and their own arm did not save them, but Your right hand and Your arm and the light of Your presence, for You favored them.” (Psalm 44:3, NASB95)

“My soul clings to You; Your right hand upholds me.” (Psalm 63:8, NASB95)

“You have a strong arm; Your hand is mighty, Your right hand is exalted.” (Psalm 89:13, NASB95)

- a) The cutting off of the hands represented a removal of that power.
 - b) Thus, Dagon was powerless before the one true God, whom the Israelites served.
- 3) Just as the Philistines had defeated the Israelites twice on the battlefield, so the LORD had now defeated Dagon in his own temple.
- The symbolism of these events reinforce an important truth — “*God alone is God.*” The gods which the nations around Israel chose to worship were nothing more than the figment of their imaginations and the product of their own hands. Some 300 years after these events, Isaiah would write of the foolishness involved in the production and worship of these idols (cf. Isaiah 44:9-20).

Slide 7

10. Note on the threshold of Dagon’s temple (v. 5)

“Therefore neither the priests of Dagon nor all who enter Dagon’s house tread on the threshold of Dagon in Ashdod to this day.” (1 Samuel 5:5, NASB95)

- a. Because they marked the boundary dividing the sacred from the profane (common), sanctuary thresholds were commonly treated with respect in the ancient world.
- b. Since a portion of Dagon’s body had touched it, a custom developed in Ashdod that no person could, from then on, step on the threshold of Dagon’s temple and thus as to defile it with their feet.

Slide 8

11. Having defeated Dagon, God now begins to afflict the citizens of Ashdod with a terrible plague.

“Now the hand of the Lord was heavy on the Ashdodites, and He ravaged them and smote them with tumors, both Ashdod and its territories.” (1 Samuel 5:6, NASB95)

12. First, the LORD “ravaged them” (v. 6)
 - a. “Brought devastation upon them,” NIV
 - b. This term is used in the Old Testament to refer to the destruction of crops.
13. Second, the Lord “smote (afflicted) them with tumors” (v. 6)
 - a. The KJV translates this word (*ōpěl*) “emerods” a Middle English word for hemorrhoids.
 - b. Others see these as inflamed swellings of the lymph glands, especially in the armpit or groin, characteristic of the bubonic plague.
 - c. This plague was known to kill more than half of the people who contracted it.¹

Slide 9**B. THE ARK IN GATH (VV. 7-9)**

“When the men of Ashdod saw that it was so, they said, “The ark of the God of Israel must not remain with us, for His hand is severe on us and on Dagon our god.” So they sent and gathered all the lords of the Philistines to them and said, “What shall we do with the ark of the God of Israel?” And they said, “Let the ark of the God of Israel be brought around to Gath.” And they brought the ark of the God of Israel around. After they had brought it around, the hand of the Lord was against

¹ Joyce G. Baldwin, *1 and 2 Samuel*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988, p. 74.

the city with very great confusion; and He smote the men of the city, both young and old, so that tumors broke out on them.” (1 Samuel 5:7–9, NASB95)

1. The men of Ashdod reasoned that the physical affliction they were experiencing was the result of the presence of “the ark of the God of Israel” (v. 7a).
2. As a result, they decided that it must not remain in their city.
3. The men of Ashdod sought the advice of their rulers — “the lords of the Philistines” — “What shall we do with the ark of the God of Israel?” (v. 8b).

Slide 10

4. The rulers advised, “Let the ark of the God of Israel be brought around to Gath” (v. 8c).
5. The situation was no better in Gath, because once the ark was in Gath,
 - a. “the hand of the Lord was against the city with very great confusion” (v. 9b).
 - b. God “smote the men of the city, both young and old, so that tumors broke out on them” (v. 9c).
6. This time the tumors broke out on both young and old.

Slide 11

7. The ark is sent to Ekron (v. 10)
 - a. The citizens of Gath sent the Ark inland to Ekron, twelve miles north of Gath, and ten miles northeast of Ashdod.
 - b. This was the closest Philistine city to Israelite territory.
 - c. Having heard about the troubles of the first two cities, the Ekronites did not welcome the Ark.
 - d. They believed that the men of Gath who moved the Ark were trying to kill them.

Slide 12

8. The plea to send the Ark home (vv. 11-12).
 - a. The Ekronites called for the lords of the Philistines and urged them to send the Ark back “to its own place.”
 - b. It was evident that the Ark was wreaking havoc and causing suffering wherever it went.
 - c. There was a power in the Ark which their god Dagon could not neutralize.
 - d. The result was a panic stricken people.
 - e. The longer the ark stayed in Philistine territory, the more intense the chastening of God became.

Slide 13

II. The Return Of The Ark (6:1-16)

A. THE DECISION TO RETURN THE ARK (6:1-9)

“Now the ark of the Lord had been in the country of the Philistines seven months. And the Philistines called for the priests and the diviners, saying, “What shall we do with the ark of the Lord? Tell us how we shall send it to its place.”” (1 Samuel 6:1–2, NASB95)

1. For seven months the Ark was moved about within Philistine territory (v. 1).
 - a. Imagine the devastation which God wrecked upon the Philistines and their territory during this time.
 - b. There was no physical army which they could see and against which they could fight bringing these calamities upon them, but the God of the Israelites.
2. However, in spite of the calamities brought on by the presence of the Ark among them, the Philistines were unwilling to relinquish their prize.
3. Now that the decision had been made to send it home, the Philistines consulted their “priests and diviners” to determine how a sacred object such as this should be handled.

4. Because they did not want to further offend the God of the Israelites and risk even greater plagues, they pleaded “Tell us how we should send it to its place?” (v. 2).

Slide 14

5. The priests and diviners evidently reasoned that they had angered the Israelite deity and thus advised the Philistine rulers not to send the Ark back without a “guilt offering” (v. 3).

“They said, “If you send away the ark of the God of Israel, do not send it empty; but you shall surely return to Him a guilt offering. Then you will be healed and it will be known to you why His hand is not removed from you.”” (1 Samuel 6:3, NASB95)

- a. This type of offering was offered when offense had been unintentional (Leviticus5:15)²
- b. The offering would acknowledge that they had committed an inadvertent trespass against the God of Israel by treating the Ark as common war booty.
- c. As they and their land were healed, they would clearly understand that both had been punished because of the treatment which the Ark had received.

Slide 15

6. “What shall be the guilt offering . . .?” (v. 4)

“Then they said, “What shall be the guilt offering which we shall return to Him?” And they said, “Five golden tumors and five golden mice according to the number of the lords of the Philistines, for one plague was on all of you and on your lords.” (1 Samuel 6:4, NASB95)

- a. “Five golden tumors”

² James E. Smith, 1 & 2 Samuel, The College Press NIV Commentary, Joplin, MO: College Press Publishing Company, 2000, p. 98.

- 1) Being fashioned in gold they would constitute a valuable gift so as to honor God.
 - 2) They were to send back with the Ark one tumor for each of the five Philistine “lords” (rulers).
- b. “Five golden mice” (NASV, KJV, RSV), “rats” (NKJV, NIV)
- 1) These are mentioned for the first time.
 - 2) They may have been the carriers of the bubonic plague which resulted in the tumors on the people.
 - 3) Or, they have been part of God’s devastation upon the land of the Philistines.
 - a) Some have identified these mice as the short-tailed field-mouse which often swarms in large numbers and ravages the cultivated fields of Palestine.
 - b) The term “plague” is the same word used to describe the plagues against Egypt (Exodus 9:14).

Slide 16

7. “You shall make likenesses of your tumors and . . . of your mice” (v. 5)

“So you shall make likenesses of your tumors and likenesses of your mice that ravage the land, and you shall give glory to the God of Israel; perhaps He will ease His hand from you, your gods, and your land.” (1 Samuel 6:5, NASB95)

- a. The golden tumors and mice (rats) were to be models of that which was causing the problems in the land of the Philistines (compare Corinth).
- b. The priests and diviners suggested that this gesture of repentance might move the God of Israel to “ease His hand from you, your gods and your land” (v. 5b).

Slide 17

8. The priests and diviners further warned the Philistines against the hardening of their hearts (v. 6).

“Why then do you harden your hearts as the Egyptians and Pharaoh hardened their hearts? When He had severely dealt with them, did they not allow the people to go, and they departed?” (1 Samuel 6:6, NASB95)

- a. Apparently there were some who did not believe God was behind their suffering.
- b. The priests and diviners reminded the rulers of God’s severe dealings with Pharaoh and Egypt when they hardened their hearts.
- c. The urging was for the Philistines to submit while the damage was relatively light.

Slide 18**9. Instructions for the return of the Ark along with the guilt offering (vv. 7-9)**

“Now therefore, take and prepare a new cart and two milch cows on which there has never been a yoke; and hitch the cows to the cart and take their calves home, away from them. Take the ark of the Lord and place it on the cart; and put the articles of gold which you return to Him as a guilt offering in a box by its side. Then send it away that it may go. Watch, if it goes up by the way of its own territory to Beth-shemesh, then He has done us this great evil. But if not, then we will know that it was not His hand that struck us; it happened to us by chance.” (1 Samuel 6:7–9, NASB95)

- a. “A new cart” — only a cart which had never been used for common labor would be suitable for transporting the sacred Ark (cf. 2 Samuel 6:3).
 - b. “Two milch cows”
 - 1) Cows which had just given birth to calves
 - 2) They had never been yoked for labor (i.e., unbroken).
- ☐ This served a three-fold purpose
- It confirmed the absence of human interference in their movements.

- It anticipated their future sacrificial role (v. 14)
 - It displayed reverence for the offended God (cf. Numbers 19:2; Deuteronomy 21:3f.)
- c. A chest containing the ten golden objects — five golden mice and five images of their tumors (6:11).

Slide 19

- d. The cart would be placed on the road to Israelite territory.
- 1) If the cows followed their natural instinct they would turn back to their calves, indicating that the plagues were mere coincidence.
 - 2) If, however, the cows moved straight forward on the road, it would indicate that the natural instinct of the cows was being overruled by Israel's God.
- e. The destination of the ark was Beth Shemesh ("House of the Sun")
- 1) A priestly city (Joshua 21:16)
 - 2) In the tribal area of Judah (Joshua 15:10)
 - 3) In the valley of Sorek, about eight miles southeast of Ekron.

Slide 20**B. THE RETURN OF THE ARK (6:10-12)**

1. The Philistines did as the priests and diviners directed.
2. The transportation instructions were followed to the letter.

Slide 21

3. The cows went straight toward Beth Shemesh.
 - a. Their lowing was evident of the fact that they longed for their calves.
 - b. However, the fact that they turned neither "to the right or to the left" indicated a supernatural force was controlling their movements in a contrary direction.
4. The Philistine rulers followed the cart all the way to the border of Beth Shemesh.

- a. Leaving the cows free to follow their own course.
- b. In order to guard their treasure from theft.
- c. To verify by firsthand observation that the cows continued to act contrary to natural instincts.

Slide 22**C. THE RECEPTION OF THE ARK (6:13-16)**

1. It has been seven months since the ark was taken in battle (cf. 1 Samuel 6:1).
2. Things have gotten back to normal in the land.
3. The people of Beth-shemesh are reaping their wheat harvest when they see the ark approach.
 - a. This would fix the time around the end of May or beginning of June.
 - b. Beth-shemesh was located at the conjunction of two valleys; Sorek to the north and Illin to the south.
4. The sight of the ark coming toward them on its own resulted in great rejoicing.
5. The cows stopped by a large rock in the field of Joshua the Beth-shemite.
6. Using the wood from the cart, the people sacrifice the cows as a burnt offering to the Lord perhaps using rocks from the field to build an altar.
 - a. The offering expressed thanksgiving (Leviticus 22:17-19; Numbers 15:1-16)
 - b. Technically, cows were not proper sacrificial animals; only males were to be offered (cf. Leviticus 1:3; 22:19)
 - c. Also, the sacrifices were not being offered at the tabernacle as the law specified — however, under extraordinary circumstances, faithful men did offer sacrifices at places other than the tabernacle (cf. 2 Samuel 24:22; 1 Kings 19:21)

Slide 23

7. Because Beth-shemesh is one of the forty six Levitical cities assigned by Joshua in the promised land, there are Levites present who take the ark

down from the ox cart and place it on the large stone.

8. In addition to the two cows, other burnt offerings and sacrifices (thank offerings) are offered to God that day.
9. The five Philistine rulers watch from a distance (v. 16).
 - a. Having seen the celebration, they return to Ekron.
 - b. There is no doubt that God ordered the events of the day.

Conclusion

1. More than a 1000 years after this event, another man stood in a city known for its many "objects of worship."
2. That man was the apostle Paul, and the city was Athens.
3. In a message about the one true God, he had this to say:

"The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands; nor is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all people life and breath and all things;" (Acts 17:24–25, NASB95)
4. He also quoted one of their own poets, Epimenides, who said, "in Him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28, NASB95).
5. There is no one else, there is no other god.
6. The question for each of us is will we follow Him and revere Him as we should.
7. This is important, because He will not be taken lightly.