

Third Presbyterian Church
Midweek Bible Study
I Samuel - Chapter 5
Superstitious Worship

1 Samuel 5:1-12 (NIV)

[5:1] After the Philistines had captured the ark of God, they took it from Ebenezer to Ashdod. [2] Then they carried the ark into Dagon's temple and set it beside Dagon. [3] When the people of Ashdod rose early the next day, there was Dagon, fallen on his face on the ground before the ark of the Lord! They took Dagon and put him back in his place. [4] But the following morning when they rose, there was Dagon, fallen on his face on the ground before the ark of the Lord! His head and hands had been broken off and were lying on the threshold; only his body remained. [5] That is why to this day neither the priests of Dagon nor any others who enter Dagon's temple at Ashdod step on the threshold. [6] The Lord's hand was heavy upon the people of Ashdod and its vicinity; he brought devastation upon them and afflicted them with tumors. [7] When the men of Ashdod saw what was happening, they said, "The ark of the god of Israel must not stay here with us, because his hand is heavy upon us and upon Dagon our god." [8] So they called together all the rulers of the Philistines and asked them, "What shall we do with the ark of the god of Israel?" They answered, "Have the ark of the god of Israel moved to Gath." So they moved the ark of the God of Israel. [9] But after they had moved it, the Lord's hand was against that city, throwing it into a great panic. He afflicted the people of the city, both young and old, with an outbreak of tumors. [10] So they sent the ark of God to Ekron. As the ark of God was entering Ekron, the people of Ekron cried out, "They have brought the ark of the god of Israel around to us to kill us and our people." [11] So they called together all the rulers of the Philistines and said, "Send the ark of the god of Israel away; let it go back to its own place, or it will kill us and our people." For death had filled the city with panic; God's hand was very heavy upon it. [12] Those who did not die were afflicted with tumors, and the outcry of the city went up to heaven.

1. Why is it self-contradicting for a Christian to be superstitious?
 - A. How does James 1:8 apply to this self-contradicting disposition?
2. Discuss what the sermon said about luck and wishing someone luck. Agree/Disagree why?
 - A. What would be your response to someone saying you are being too religious with a negative stance on using the word "luck?"
3. How would you minister to someone who says they believe in God, but does not pay yet follows the direction of their daily horoscope?
4. Read Deuteronomy 18:9-13 and discuss why these practices are detestable to the Lord?
5. How do some people use Christian symbols (bible, crucifix, etc.) in a superstitious way?
 - A. Why is this wrong to do?
6. Why are you a worshipper of God?
7. Share your main takeaway from the sermon and the lesson?

F. The Ark Returned to Israel by the Philistines: A Lesson on God's Judgment upon All Unbelievers and False Worshipers,

(5:1-6:21) **Introduction— Judgment, Truth of— Judgment, Surety of:** the judgment of God is coming upon all unbelievers and false worshippers. And the judgment of God cannot be escaped. We may not like the thought of God's judgment, but if we fail to believe and trust Christ, God forewarns us: we will face the condemnation and wrath of God. His hand of judgment will fall upon us. Time and again the truth of judgment is demonstrated in Scripture. The present passage is an example from which we are to draw lesson after lesson. This is: *The Ark Returned to Israel by the Philistines: A Lesson on God's Judgment upon All Unbelievers and False Worshipers, 5:1–6:21.*

1. God proved that idols are nothing: He alone is the only living and true God (v.1-5).
2. God demonstrated that He would judge all unbelievers and false worshippers: He would put the fear of God in them (v.6-12).
3. God proved His awesome power (sovereignty): Power to control human events (6:1-12).
4. God showed how people are to enter His presence: to approach Him through the substitute sacrifice and to honor Him as holy (v.13-21).

1. (5:1-5) Idolatry, Powerlessness of— Religion, Powerlessness of— Ark of God, Under the Philistines— Powerlessness, of Idolatry— Powerlessness, of False Religion— Dagon, a False God or Idol— Philistines, Idolatry of— Worship, False, Powerlessness of— God, Existence of— God, Proof of: God proved that idols and false gods are nothing, that He and He alone is the only living and true God. This fact is clearly seen in the event that took place:

1. Right after capturing the Ark of God, the Philistines took it to Ashdod, their capital city (1 Samuel 5:1-2). They placed it in the major temple of Dagon, who was the chief Philistine god. In their muddled understanding, they thought this: their god Dagon had led them to victory over the Israelites; therefore, their god was stronger than the LORD (Jehovah, Yahweh). The Ark, which they thought was an idol of the Israelite god(s), should therefore be placed in the temple of Dagon, showing reverence and submission before Dagon.

2. But note what happened: the very next morning, the idol was found lying facedown on the ground before the Ark, a clear sign that Dagon was *nothing* before the face of the LORD. When the people entered the temple, they were bound to be wondering what had happened. How could the idol have fallen facedown? And note: the idol was lifeless, powerless to set itself back up. The people had to pick up the idol and set it back in its place.

3. But the following morning when the people arose and entered the temple, the idol was again facedown on the ground, prostrate before the Ark of the LORD (1 Samuel 5:4). This time, however, there was a shocking difference: the idol's head and hands were broken off, lying on the threshold. Only the trunk of the idol's body was left intact.

4. The spiritual blindness of the Philistines was astounding (1 Samuel 5:5). Their false religion, belief in the power of the idol Dagon, should have been shaken. By their idol's being overthrown and broken in pieces, humiliated in reverence and submission before the Ark of God's presence, the Philistines should have acknowledged the LORD and repented before Him. The prostration of the idol Dagon before the LORD on two consecutive days was not an accident. One day might have been interpreted as an accident, but not two days. This was a clear sign that the LORD was the *only living and true God*. Consequently, the Philistines were without excuse when they failed to acknowledge the LORD and repent before Him. In fact, instead of repenting, they used the event to begin a special superstitious ritual. They began to look upon the threshold as possessing supernatural power because it had come in contact with the head and hands of Dagon. Consequently, the people adopted the policy of stepping over the threshold out of respect for Dagon.

Thought 1. There is only one living and true God, the LORD Himself (Jehovah, Yahweh). There is none other. All other so-called gods are false, nothing but idols or ideas that people create within their minds.

False gods are lifeless and powerless to help us when problems and trials confront us. Just think of the hardships and misfortunes that strike us throughout life:

- sickness
- disease
- accidents
- financial difficulties
- disturbed relationships
- broken promises
- pain
- depression
- loneliness
- guilt
- temptation
- death

No mental god—no god created by the imagination or thought—can deliver us through the hardships and misfortunes of life. False gods are lifeless, powerless. They are only ideas, pictures of the imagination. Only the LORD Himself—the only living and true God—can help and deliver us through the trials and temptations of life. For this reason, the LORD demands two things of us:

1) The LORD demands that we have absolutely nothing to do with false gods and idols.

"Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device. And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commanded all men everywhere to repent" (Acts 17:29-30).

"For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, *even* his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse: Because that, when they knew God, they glorified *him* not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things" (Romans 1:20-23).

"Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen" (1 John 5:21).

"Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness *of any thing* that is in heaven above, or that *is* in the earth beneath, or that *is* in the water under the earth" (Exodus 20:4).

2) The LORD demands that we acknowledge and worship Him, the only living and true God.

"My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God?" (Psalms 42:2).

"For they themselves show of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God" (1 Thessalonians 1:9).

"And Jesus answered him, The first of all the commandments *is*, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord" (Mark 12:29).

"And the scribe said unto him, Well, Master, thou hast said the truth: for there is one God; and there is none other but he" (Mark 12:32).

"And saying, Sirs, why do ye these things? We also are men of like passions with you, and preach unto you that ye should turn from these vanities unto the living God, which made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all things that are therein" (Acts 14:15).

**"One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all"
(Ephesians 4:6).**

"For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Timothy 2:5).

2. (5:6-12) Judgment, Surety of— Worshippers, False, Judgment of— Judgment, of False

Worshippers— Fear, of God, Example of— Unbelievers, Judgment of: God used the capture of the Ark to teach a much needed lesson to the world: all unbelievers and false worshippers were to face the judgment of God. The "LORD's hand" was heavy against the Philistines and would be heavy against all who opposed Him. This term, "the LORD's hand," is the major theme throughout this Scripture. It is used seven times in describing God's dealings with the Philistines: His hand was heavy against them (5:6, 7, 9, 11; 6:3, 5, 9). Note how heavily God's hand or judgment moved against the Philistines:

1. The LORD judged, afflicted the people of Ashdod with tumors (1 Samuel 5:7-8). Apparently, these tumors were caused by disease-carrying rats (6:4). Because of their affliction, the people were stricken with panic and began to fear the God of the Israelites. They began to question whether the Ark of God should be taken to another city. Eventually, the city leaders requested a conference with all the Philistine rulers, asking for advice (1 Samuel 5:8). Their conclusion was a suggestion that the Ark be moved to Gath.

2. But this was an ill-fated decision, for the LORD immediately struck again, judging and afflicting the people of Gath (1 Samuel 5:8). Young and old alike felt the wrath of God's hand in judgment, suffering an outbreak of tumors. Panic and fear of the LORD again struck the people. So they too decided to move the Ark to another city, Ekron.

3. But the result was the same: the LORD judged and afflicted the people of Ekron (1 Samuel 5:10-12). It seems that God's hand of judgment fell suddenly as the Ark was being carried into the city of Ekron, for the people began to cry out in terror when they saw the Ark. An awful sense of distress gripped their hearts. Immediately, the city leaders requested a conference with all the other Philistine rulers and demanded that the Ark be sent away (1 Samuel 5:11). In fact, note where they suggested it be sent: back to Israel.

Scripture graphically describes the scene of judgment upon Ekron: death filled the city, and panic struck the hearts of the citizens. God's hand was very heavy upon the city, moving in judgment among all the citizens. Many died, and everyone else was afflicted with tumors. The outcry of the city rose up to heaven itself. As a result, the Philistine rulers were considering sending the Ark back to Israel.

Thought 1. The hand of God's judgment will fall upon all unbelievers and false worshippers of this world. Often His judgment falls during this life. But if a person escapes the discipline and judgment of God upon this earth, he will face the judgment of God when he dies and comes face-to-face with God. There is no escape from the judgment of God. Every person will stand before God and give an account of his life. God warns all unbelievers and false worshippers: they will face the judgment of God.

"He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him" (John 3:36).