

6. One true God who cannot be defeated

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When we realize that we cannot compete with someone who is much stronger, better, and smarter than us, it is best for our own benefit to listen to that person. If we insist on our ways, either we are going to get hurt or get humiliated. That was the case in point with these Philistine people against God.

In chapter 4, the Israelites brought the ark of God into the battlefield and believed that the mere presence of the ark of God would win the battle for them. Because they believed it as a lucky charm, but they did not trust the God of the ark. The result was far more terrible than they expected. 30,000 foot soldiers were killed in the battle. To make the matter worse, the ark of God was captured by the Philistines. The Israelites put their tails between their legs and hightailed out to their camp. I am sure that there was a roar of victory chant from the side of the Philistine.

We are going to pick up the scene where the Philistines were bringing their main spoil of the battle, the ark of the God of Israel into their base camp, Ashdod.

A. NO COMPETITION

1 Samuel 5:1-5 Then the Philistines took the ark of God and brought it from Ebenezer to Ashdod. 2 When the Philistines took the ark of God, they brought it into the house of Dagon and set it by Dagon. 3 And when the people of Ashdod arose early in the morning, there was Dagon, fallen on its face to the earth before the ark of the Lord. So they took Dagon and set it in its place again. 4 And when they arose early the next morning, there was Dagon, fallen on its face to the ground before the ark of the Lord. The head of Dagon and both the palms of its hands were broken off on the threshold; only Dagon's torso was left of it. 5 Therefore neither the priests of Dagon nor any who come into Dagon's house tread on the threshold of Dagon in Ashdod to this day.

What is your interpretation for this portion?

The five key cities of the Philistines were Ashdod, Gaza, Ashkelon, Gath, and Ekron, and each had a lord. The Philistines first put the ark into the temple of their god Dagon in Ashdod as evidence that Dagon was stronger and greater than Jehovah God. At the beginning of the battle as we studied in chapter 3, the Philistines were frightened when they heard that the God of Israel was in the camp, but now they were making fun of Him and exalting their own gods.

What is this Dagon? It is the chief god of the Philistines, since they were polytheists. They believed that it was supposed to control the weather and the fertility of the land. The appearance of this Dagon was a man's head with a fish body. The god appears to be a Philistine adaptation of the Canaanite god Baal, who is sometimes referred to in ancient literature as the "son of Dago." Philistia was an important grain producing region; the worship of Dagon was thought to ensure a good crop. This Dagon god also represents sex and violence, just like its descendant, Baal.

They brought the ark into the house of Dagon, and set it by Dagon. No doubt, the Philistines were jubilant, and confident in the superiority of their god over the God of Israel. They had faced the God of Israel in battle, and believed their god Dagon had delivered them and defeated Israel. Now, the Ark of the Covenant of Israel's

God stood as a trophy in the temple of their god Dagon. The victory was complete for them.

But in the morning, they were not laughing. Do you know what Dagon said to the people of Philistine? "I have fallen, I can't get up." Dagon, a false god couldn't stand in the presence of the true God.

What kind of god did these Philistine people have that they had to pick him up, because he fell before the ark of the Israel God? They had to do something for him, because he could not do anything for his people.

Let's examine our situation: Do we have the same kind of gods in our lives that we have to go around and take care of? Our one true God takes care of us, we don't take care of Him. So what kind of God should we have – the one needs our care or the One who takes care of us?

God will glorify Himself. When men disgrace the glory of God, we fear that God will go without glory. We think God's glory has departed. But when men and women do not glorify God, God would glorify Himself.

If that was not bad enough, their puny god Dagon hasn't seen anything yet. An accident two days in a row? And now, the head and hands of Dagon are broken? How strange!

The head is the seat of wisdom and the hands, the instruments of action. Both are cut off, to show that Dagon had neither wisdom, nor strength to defend himself, and his worshippers.

After seeing the superiority of the God of Israel, these Philistine priests had two choices. They could turn from their weak, inferior god Dagon, and begin serving the mighty, superior Lord of Israel. Or they could stick with a religious tradition instead. They chose their religious tradition. Because of this incident, neither the priests of Dagon, nor any who come into Dagon's house, tread on the threshold of Dagon in Ashdod from then on.

These Philistine priests, like men confronted with the truth today, rejected God despite the evidence. They wanted to believe it was an accident. How could they believe something so ridiculous? Many people of today are no different than these Philistine people. They'd rather believe the evolution theory, the Area 51, little green aliens in spaceships, and even Star Wars garbage than God Almighty, because they don't want to be accountable to the Lord.

Because worshipping the Lord instead of Dagon meant a huge change in their thinking and living. The Philistine priests were unwilling to make those changes. Setting Dagon up and gluing him back together was easier than changing their life and thinking by following the true God.

John 3:19 And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.

B. PAIN IN THE REAR ENDS

1 Samuel 5:6-8 But the hand of the Lord was heavy on the people of Ashdod, and He ravaged them and struck them with tumors, both Ashdod

and its territory. 7 And when the men of Ashdod saw how it was, they said, "The ark of the God of Israel must not remain with us, for His hand is harsh toward us and Dagon our god." 8 Therefore they sent and gathered to themselves all the lords of the Philistines, and said, "What shall we do with the ark of the God of Israel?" And they answered, "Let the ark of the God of Israel be carried away to Gath." So they carried the ark of the God of Israel away.

What is your interpretation of this?

God not only destroyed their image of Dagon god, but also He spanked the Dagon worshippers on their butts. Some of your versions call it "swelling." That is another right translation, too. The Hebrew word for "tumors" is "têchor." According to a Bible dictionary, it is "tumors, hemorrhoids, a boil or ulcer (from the inflammation), especially a tumor in the anus." I think that God is having fun with these people and their false belief. They wouldn't stand for God, God made them that they couldn't sit, either.

To add more problems, God sent mice, according to 6:4, to plague the people. The mice ruined the crops and carried disease germs to the people.

Aren't you glad that you don't have these people as your neighbors? After the receiving end of all the hind problems, the Philistines still didn't turn to God. Instead, they sent away God's ark. They were thinking that out of their sight, out of God's reach. Wrong! Some of us are so stubborn like these Philistines. When God tries to get our attention with His disciplines for us, instead of turning to Him, we sometimes push Him away. That really doesn't help any. No matter where we turn, God is there. We cannot run away from the presence of God.

C. PASS THAT HOT POTATO

1 Samuel 5:9-12 So it was, after they had carried it away, that the hand of the Lord was against the city with a very great destruction; and He struck the men of the city, both small and great, and tumors broke out on them. 10 Therefore they sent the ark of God to Ekron. So it was, as the ark of God came to Ekron, that the Ekronites cried out, saying, "They have brought the ark of the God of Israel to us, to kill us and our people!" 11 So they sent and gathered together all the lords of the Philistines, and said, "Send away the ark of the God of Israel, and let it go back to its own place, so that it does not kill us and our people." For there was a deadly destruction throughout all the city; the hand of God was very heavy there. 12 And the men who did not die were stricken with the tumors, and the cry of the city went up to heaven.

Please give me your interpretation here.

Instead of submitting to the God of Israel, they decided to get rid of Him by passing the Ark to the neighbors with whom they don't want to be friends anymore. Like that, the problem is that we can't get rid of God. We must all face God, and stand before Him one day.

The Ark of the Covenant is now, among the Philistines, a "hot potato," burning every city where it stays. The Ekronites were not happy to see the ark, but they still wouldn't submit to the Lord God of Israel.

The Philistines, if they would have repented and turned to the Lord, could have benefited from the ark. Instead, it became a curse and a judgment to them.

We face difficulties and hopeless situations in our lives. So we try very hard to get rid of those difficulties from our lives by using some psychological methods, programs, religions, or people. Oh, they might entertain us and give us false hope for a time. But deep down, we are still empty, until we let the presence of God come into our hearts. Unless we have Jesus in our hearts and let Him override what we want to do in our lives, we really don't have the hope and peace.

Here are 3 things we must consider while we are in discipline:

1) Don't press God to end your discipline.

It is waste of time. He is not going to be pushed around by you or me.

2) Don't hold others responsible for the discipline you are receiving from the Lord.

Your repentance doesn't start until you take full responsibility of your action. Without that genuine repentance you will not be restored. The discipline continues.

3) When it is time to be restored, draw attention away from yourself, but direct it to the Lord and His plan.

Just because we turn our faces away from God, it doesn't mean that He cannot see us. He knows our thoughts and the intentions of our hearts. It is better for us to surrender to God and obey His commands.

2 Corinthians 2:15-16 For we are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing. To the one we are the aroma of death leading to death, and to the other the aroma of life leading to life. And who is sufficient for these things?

The same is true for the presence of God among us. The work of Jesus on our behalf will either be the greatest blessing we have ever known for all eternity or it will be the greatest witness of God's judgment against us. If we submit and surrender to God, it can be a blessing. If we refuse His voice and His heart towards us, it can be a curse. What will we decide?

D. APPLICATIONS

1) No program, no method, no religion, no person, no philosophy can replace God.

2) God cannot be pushed away.