

GLORY & PRESENCE | BEYOND BORDERS

INTRO

We're in a series that is following the accounts of [1 Samuel 4-6](#) where the Ark of the Covenant has been lost, in captivity, and restored to Israel. The Ark is not merely a religious item, but rather the symbol of God's glory and presence on earth in that day.

Last week we saw how God's people had broke faith with God and when they attempted to misuse the Ark to advance their purposes, they not only lost the battle, experienced the consequences of their sin, but they lost the Ark to their enemies.

The symbolism is rich in [1 Samuel 4](#).

- In breaking faith, but keeping the rituals, they had lost the glory and presence of God long before they lost the ark.
- When God lifted his presence and his hand from Israel, they were experiencing His judgment.
- When the Philistines capture the Ark, the eyes of Israel were suddenly opened to the tragic condition they truly were in... godless.
 - They had broke faith with God and abandoned his covenant... so he withdrew his presence in allowing the ark to be captured.

So what happens next in [1 Samuel 5-6:12](#)?

- What does the Ark do beyond the borders of Israel?
- Was the God of Israel defeated by the god(s) of the Philistines (for that is how the Philistines interpreted their victory)?
- Did God need Israel to advance his glory?
- Would the Ark return to Israel? How?

HELPFUL CONTEXT:

- **Dagon (Dagan) is the chief god of the Philistines**
 - Some think him to be represented as a half fish - half man looking deity.
 - Other scholars seem to think he was more of a fertility god associated with the term for grain.
 - Some yet think the term for grain is rooted in the name of Dagan.
 - Of note, there is some evidence that in some regions, Dagan is understood to be the father of ba'al (in their pantheon)

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- **It is evidenced that Dagan (and his cult) predates Philistine arrival to the land of Canaan.**
 - This would imply that Dagan is part of the Canaanite pantheon and idolatry that Israel was commanded to remove from the land during the conquest.
 - Rather than being removed from the land, Dagan and the ba'als and asherahs became snares to the people of Israel.
- **While the people of Israel worshiped the Lord (Yahweh) and performed all the rituals, they broke faith with their pluralistic thinking and worship.**
 - They worshiped Yahweh and Dagan (or ba'al and asherah)
 - They sought to please Yahweh by performing the sacrifices and rituals, but they also 'hedged their bets' by worshiping the fertility gods and cults.
 - They were not faithful to God. They were not singleminded in their devotion to him.

Understand this: ANCIENT & MODERN IDOLATRY

- **Idolatry is giving ultimate trust, loyalty, fear, or love to anything other than God.**
 - In Scripture, idols were not just statues; they were rival sources of security, identity, and control. The statue was the *symbol*—the heart allegiance was the real issue (cf. [Ezek. 14:3](#)).
- **Modern idolatry operates on the same logic as ancient idolatry.**
 - Ancient people asked:
 - Who will protect me?
 - Who will provide for me?
 - Who will give me success, fertility, safety, identity?
 - Modern people ask the same questions—just of different “gods.”
 - The ancient world bowed to visible gods for invisible benefits.
 - The modern world bows to invisible gods for visible results.
- **While idolatry in our post-enlightenment west doesn't wear the face of golden idols or statues... its presence and temptations are very real today.**
 - It CAN look like:
 - Putting money or career before God | When financial security or professional success becomes what we trust to sustain us, justify us, or define our worth.

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- Putting family before God | Like Eli, honoring relationships above obedience—when peace in the home matters more than faithfulness to God.
- Serving self rather than submitting to obedience | When personal fulfillment becomes the highest good, and God is valued only if He supports our desires.
- Asking God for help while hedging our bets | Praying for God's provision while simultaneously disobeying Him through worldly compromise—trusting Him in word but not in practice.
- Religious syncretism and plurality | Treating Jesus as one source of help among many—faith in Christ combined with self-help, superstition, political saviors, or cultural ideologies.
- The most dangerous idols are not always the scandalous ones—but the respectable ones.
 - These include:
 - Productivity
 - Comfort
 - Safety
 - Reputation
 - Control
 - “Normal life”
- **Idolatry has not disappeared in the modern world; it has simply learned to speak the language of respectability, pragmatism, and self-fulfillment.**
 - But in the end, modern idolatry is just as worthless as the ancient gods of old.
 - (They might even seem to ‘work’ for a time)
 - They promise you the world, but ultimately deliver you heartache, pain, and death.

1 Samuel 5 ESV

¹ When the Philistines captured the ark of God, they brought it from Ebenezer to Ashdod. ²

Then the Philistines took the ark of God and brought it into the house of Dagon and set it up beside Dagon. ³ And when the people of Ashdod rose early the next day, behold, Dagon had fallen face downward on the ground before the ark of the LORD. So they took Dagon and put him back in his place. ⁴ But when they rose early on the next morning, behold, Dagon had

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fallen face downward on the ground before the ark of the LORD, and the head of Dagon and both his hands were lying cut off on the threshold. Only the trunk of Dagon was left to him.⁵ This is why the priests of Dagon and all who enter the house of Dagon do not tread on the threshold of Dagon in Ashdod to this day.⁶ The hand of the LORD was heavy against the people of Ashdod, and he terrified and afflicted them with tumors, both Ashdod and its territory.⁷ And when the men of Ashdod saw how things were, they said, “The ark of the God of Israel must not remain with us, for his hand is hard against us and against Dagon our god.”⁸ So they sent and gathered together all the lords of the Philistines and said, “What shall we do with the ark of the God of Israel?” They answered, “Let the ark of the God of Israel be brought around to Gath.” So they brought the ark of the God of Israel there.⁹ But after they had brought it around, the hand of the LORD was against the city, causing a very great panic, and he afflicted the men of the city, both young and old, so that tumors broke out on them.¹⁰ So they sent the ark of God to Ekron. But as soon as the ark of God came to Ekron, the people of Ekron cried out, “They have brought around to us the ark of the God of Israel to kill us and our people.”¹¹ They sent therefore and gathered together all the lords of the Philistines and said, “Send away the ark of the God of Israel, and let it return to its own place, that it may not kill us and our people.” For there was a deathly panic throughout the whole city. The hand of God was very heavy there.¹² The men who did not die were struck with tumors, and the cry of the city went up to heaven.

1 Samuel 6:1-12 ESV

¹ The ark of the LORD was in the country of the Philistines seven months. ² And the Philistines called for the priests and the diviners and said, “What shall we do with the ark of the LORD? Tell us with what we shall send it to its place.”³ They said, “If you send away the ark of the God of Israel, do not send it empty, but by all means return him a guilt offering. Then you will be healed, and it will be known to you why his hand does not turn away from you.”⁴ And they said, “What is the guilt offering that we shall return to him?” They answered, “Five golden tumors and five golden mice, according to the number of the lords of the Philistines, for the same plague was on all of you and on your lords.⁵ So you must make images of your tumors and images of your mice that ravage the land, and give glory to the God of Israel. Perhaps he will lighten his hand from off you and your gods and your land.⁶ Why should you harden your hearts as the Egyptians and Pharaoh hardened their hearts? After he had dealt severely with them, did they not send the people away, and they departed?⁷ Now then, take and prepare a

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new cart and two milk cows on which there has never come a yoke, and yoke the cows to the cart, but take their calves home, away from them.⁸ And take the ark of the LORD and place it on the cart and put in a box at its side the figures of gold, which you are returning to him as a guilt offering. Then send it off and let it go its way⁹ and watch. If it goes up on the way to its own land, to Beth-shemesh, then it is he who has done us this great harm, but if not, then we shall know that it is not his hand that struck us; it happened to us by coincidence.”¹⁰ The men did so, and took two milk cows and yoked them to the cart and shut up their calves at home.¹¹ And they put the ark of the LORD on the cart and the box with the golden mice and the images of their tumors.¹² And the cows went straight in the direction of Beth-shemesh along one highway, lowing as they went. They turned neither to the right nor to the left, and the lords of the Philistines went after them as far as the border of Beth-shemesh.

1: GOD IS UNCONQUERABLE

THE PHILISTINES THOUGHT THEY CONQUERED YAHWEH ALONG WITH ISRAEL

- Remember in ch4, they believed that Yahweh had come into the Israelite camp (with the Ark)
- Therefore when they won the battle and captured the ark, they assumed the victory of Dagon over Yahweh.
- This was common belief in the Ancient Near East - battles were won not just over peoples, but gods

THEY SOUGHT TO PUT YAHWEH'S ARK IN SUBJECTION TO DAGON

- Again, common to the Ancient Near East, they ‘losing’ god was captured and brought into a subservient position of the ‘victorious god.’
- The Ark of the Lord was set up beside Dagon, representative of his subjection/servitude to Dagon.

INSTEAD, GOD HUMILIATED AND LATER EXECUTED DAGON IN HIS OWN HOUSE

- **First morning:**
 - The people of Ashdod find Dagon lying face down (prostrate) before the Ark.
 - This is a position of worship... the opposite of what they had set up or expected.

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- Irony: they had to ‘set’ Dagon back up. He was truly powerless to even help himself.
- **Second morning:**
 - The people of Ashdod find Dagon again facedown before the Ark.
 - This time, however, his head and hands have been CUT off (not broken off).
 - Some scholars note here that the location is also remarkable.
 - That his head and hands would lie on the threshold makes it impossible that the head and hands simply broke off.
 - Lastly, the picture of Dagon’s ‘trunk’ only remaining is a picture of his impotence.
 - Dagon has no wisdom, authority, or power.
 - He cannot speak, hear, or help his followers.
- **In his own house (temple)**
 - Ancient people understood their gods to have regional influence
 - Where could Dagon be more powerful than in his own temple?
 - Yet it was there that he was defeated, humiliated, and executed.

2: GOD REVEALS HIS GLORY TO THE PHILISTINES

DAGON WAS IMPOTENT, BUT YAHWEH WAS POWERFUL

- The wording in v6, 7, 9, & 11 regarding the ‘hand of the lord’ was heavy or against the Philistines
 - Meanwhile, Dagon lie broken and handless.
- The heavy hand of the Lord was that the Lord inflicted a plague upon the Philistines.
 - No, Yahweh was not conquered... He was conquering the Philistines and their gods
 - Without a single Israelite sword (or prayer)

THEY SOUGHT TO DELIVER THEMSELVES, BUT ONLY SPREAD GOD’S JUDGMENT

- They sent the ark from town to town thinking to escape the plague of God’s judgment.
- They thought the plague would be confined to the proximity of the Ark
- Rather, they spread the judgment of God.
- Notice their use of the ark in similarity to the Israelites:
 - They too try to manipulate God by maneuvering the Ark
 - They thought it was a tool to use... in this case moving it to remove their pain.

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- This affirms that what Israel did when they brought the ark into battle, was that they had reduced their understanding of God down to the pagan beliefs and practices of Canaan.
 - ‘send god there’
 - ‘use his power here’

WHEN THE CRIES OF THE PEOPLE WENT UP TO HEAVEN, GOD GRANTED EVEN THE PAGAN'S PRAYER FOR RELIEF

- Notice v12.
- Its reminiscent even of Israelite prayers... prayers for God to hear and have mercy.
- The Philistines consult their lords and diviners and concoct a plan to deliver the ark back to Israel
 - They recognize the similarities to Egypt and do not harden their hearts
 - They don't treat the Ark as they should, but yet with the fear/respect they can
 - They do offer a sacrifice seeking to appease God's wrath.
 - In their blindness, they do more to repent than Israel with all their light.
- God hears their imperfect prayer and relents — he grants them mercy from the plague.

NOTICE THE MIRACLES:

- Dagon falling down prostrate before the Ark twice was confirmation of the Lord's superiority and the miracle.
 - It wasn't an earthquake, instability, a breeze, or coincidence.
 - It was by the power of Yahweh.
- The milk cows abandoning their calves to deliver the Ark back to Israel
 - This was to confirm (in their own understanding of the events) that the plague was an act of the Lord

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3: GOD IS OFTEN WORKING BEYOND OUR BORDERS AND BEYOND OUR UNDERSTANDING

GOD CAN USE OUR “FAILURE” TO ADVANCE HIS PURPOSES

- Israel was supposed to be a light to the nations by which God revealed his glory.
- But when they fail and walk in idolatry, He manifests his glory and greatness to the nations.
- Imagine the impact this would have had on the Philistines.
 - Dagon is powerless to save.
 - The God of Israel has prevailed mightily once again (they understood Egypt already)
- Many would remain hardhearted, but I have to believe this was convincing to some.

GOD WAS NOT ONLY REVEALING HIS GLORY TO THE PHILISTINES BUT ALSO TO HIS WAYWARD PEOPLE

- The testimony that comes back to Israel is the conquest of Dagon by the Ark of the Lord.
- The gods that Israel ‘committed adultery’ with were in fact powerless to help, save, and deliver.
- There is no need to ‘hedge your bet’ with a powerless god who was humiliated and executed in his own house.

In essence, God was working through the failure of his people beyond their borders to reveal his glory, power, and presence while simultaneously proving the worthlessness and futility of the false gods and idolatry.

RESPONSE:

- **Where is your trust?**
 - Idols and gods today as in the ancient world are truly powerless to save.
 - Only the Lord is worthy of your worship, love, and trust.
- **The Lord is not a power to be manipulated or sent for our purposes**
- **He is the Creator to be worshipped and served**