

# I Samuel 5 & 6 Handout

Last week in chapter 4, we saw how the Israelites were misusing the Ark of the Covenant. They were treating it like a good luck charm rather than seeing it for what it was: a symbol of the presence of God. They were treating the Ark and God just like any other pagan nation treated their god(s). All of this wasn't without consequences. When they went into battle, they were crushed by the Philistines and thousands of lives were lost. We also saw how at the end of chapter 4, the Ark was in the hands of the Philistines.

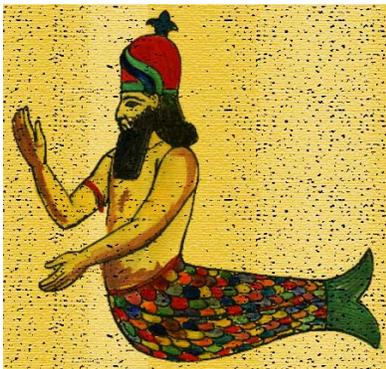
The two chapters we are studying today will follow the ark's seven month stay in Philistia.

## Verse 1-2

**Where are we told the Philistines took the ark of God?** \_\_\_\_\_

Ashdod stood about 30 miles to the southwest and three miles from the Mediterranean coast.

**Where did they place the ark?** \_\_\_\_\_



Dagon was the main god of the Philistines. They believed he helped them in battle and sent rain to ensure bountiful harvests. Dag in Hebrew means 'fishy part'. The notion that Dagon was a god whose upper body was that of a man and the lower body that of a fish has been prevalent for decades.

**So, why would the Philistines put the ark next to Dagon?**

The Philistines would have drawn certain conclusions after they captured the ark of the covenant. They would now conclude that Israel's god (Yahweh) was an inferior deity that was unable to protect Israel and was useless in the face of their god Dagon. Placing the ark next to Dagon would show that Israel's deity was now in support of their efforts towards dominance of the land.

## Verses 3-5

**What did the people find the next morning?**

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They set Dagon back in his place.

Dagon was in a position of servitude and worship of Yahweh. The fact that the Philistines had to reposition the idol is another allusion to Dagon's inferiority. He could not act on his own.

**What did they find the next day?** \_\_\_\_\_

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Some see Dagon's head as a symbol of his sovereign control and his palms as his power. In the ancient Near East, warring armies were known to cut off and collect the heads and hands of their defeated enemies.

Notice the detail of where Dagon was lying. On the threshold. When verse 5 says 'for that reason' it is referring to this. In ancient times, sanctuary thresholds were commonly treated with respect because it marked the boundary that divided the sacred and indecent.

**How is this image of Dagon here a representation of Christ and the New Testament Gospel compared to idolatry and false religions?**

**What are we told about the priests of Dagon and any other who enter the house?**

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Breaking Dagon's head and hands on the threshold of his temple, to them, rendered the threshold sacred. From then on anyone who entered superstitiously regarded the threshold as holy. Dagon's defeat and humiliation before Yahweh cast a long shadow on Philistine history.

**Verse 6-7**

**What was heavy on the Ashdodites?** \_\_\_\_\_

We are going to see this phrase (the Lord's hand) several times in the ark narrative. The hand of the Lord represents Yahweh in action.

**What two things are we told he did to both Ashdod and its territories?**

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**What did the men of Ashdod decide?** \_\_\_\_\_

**Why?** \_\_\_\_\_

**What is ironic about their theory of why they were experiencing these judgments?**

**Verses 8**

**Who do they gather together?** \_\_\_\_\_

The Philistines had five governors that ruled them. Each of these rulers had authority over a different city which were Gath, Ekron, Ashdod, Ashkelon and Gaza.

**What do they decide to do with the ark?** \_\_\_\_\_

They evidently thought that it was with the city of Ashdod that the Lord was not happy with, so they moved the ark to Gath which was about 12 miles southeast of Ashdod.

The people of Ashdod should have turned from worshipping Dagon and put their trust in the Lord. Death followed because they chose to continue in unbelief in spite of their confession of God's superiority.

**Verses 9-10 READ**

**What happened when they took the ark to Gath?**

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**What happened to the young and old?** \_\_\_\_\_

**Where do they decide to send the ark now?** \_\_\_\_\_

Ekron stood about six miles north of Gath. The ark's reputation preceded it to this town and its residents didn't welcome it as a trophy of war.

**What do the people of Ekron say?** \_\_\_\_\_

They see the ark as an instrument of death.

**Verses 11-12**

They gather all the governors again. **What do the people tell them to do?**

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It says that the hand of God was very heavy there.

**What happened to the people who didn't die?** \_\_\_\_\_

**What are we told about the outcry of the city?** \_\_\_\_\_

**What is significantly different about God's supernatural working here from the signs He performed previously in Dagon's temple?**

**I Samuel 6 Notes**

**Verses 1-2**

**How long are we told the ark stayed in Philistine territory?** \_\_\_\_\_

**What can we learn from the fact that the ark stayed this long in Philistine territory?**

The overarching question we see in this chapter is 'Has the God of Israel brought this on them or is it mere chance?'

**Who did the Philistines call on?** \_\_\_\_\_

**What do they want to know?** \_\_\_\_\_

**What is different about who is approached for advice on how to solve the problem now from who was consulted previously in chapter 5?**

### Verses 3

**What is the advice given to them?** \_\_\_\_\_

Guilt offerings were common in ancient Near Eastern religions. This offering was to compensate for trespassing against God by capturing the ark. Protocol mandated that the worshipper not approach his god(s) empty handed.

**Then what do they think will happen?** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

They are interested in figuring out whether Israel's god is really responsible for their troubles, and if He is, then they want to placate Him and escape His anger.

### Verse 4-5

**What did they decide the guilt offering should be?** \_\_\_\_\_

This would correspond to the five governors of the Philistines.

They are supposed to make likenesses of their tumors and their mice that are ruining the land.

**What does it say they shall give?** \_\_\_\_\_

**What is the hope?** \_\_\_\_\_

**From who?** \_\_\_\_\_

Many interpreters conclude that the Philistines had experienced something like the bubonic plague, that fleas living on rodents transmit. Bubonic plague causes tumors. Whether mice were tied to the tumors or were a second problem we don't know, but the Philistines were making an additional guilt offering with the five gold mice.

The Philistines might have intended the images to trigger what is called sympathetic magic.

They were hoping by sending the images of the tumors and mice out of their country the actual problems would depart as well.

### Verse 6

**What do the priests ask them?** \_\_\_\_\_

**Like who?** \_\_\_\_\_

In the Hebrew, this question creates an interesting wordplay: 'It is better to honor Israel's God than to harden one's heart as the Egyptians did.' It's ironic that the Philistine priests and diviners are now urging their people to give glory to the God of Israel. They seem to be remembering how the plagues increased as Pharaoh continued to harden his heart towards God.

**Verses 7-8**

**What are the people told to do?**

Prepare a \_\_\_\_\_ and two \_\_\_\_\_ that \_\_\_\_\_.

They are told to hitch the cows to the cart and send the calves home.

**What are they told to do next?** \_\_\_\_\_

**With what else?** \_\_\_\_\_

Then send it away.

They are making the situation as hard as they can to make sure they will be able to know for sure if all of what has been happening is truly coming from the God of Israel. They are taking two milk cows who are still nursing their calves and yoking them for the very first time to a cart.

**Verse 9 READ**

**What are they told to do?** \_\_\_\_\_

**If the cart goes to its own territory to Beth-shemesh then what?**

\_\_\_\_\_

Beth-shemesh was about nine miles south of Ekron.

**If it doesn't, what do they say that means?** \_\_\_\_\_

Having not learned the right lessons from any of the signs, they seek closure to the whole situation by seeking yet another sign.

**Verse 10-11**

They do everything that they have been advised to do.

**Verse 12**

**Where are we told the cows went?** \_\_\_\_\_

They didn't turn from the right or left. We are told the governors of the Philistines followed them to the border.

It is obvious that these cows are acting against nature, and are under divine guidance. If you know anything about taking a new calf from its mama, you know it doesn't look anything like this. A mama will fight and bellow and try to get back to her calf. That's not happening here.

**What can we learn from the fact that these events all took place over a seven month period?**

**All of the conditions set by the Philistine priests and diviners to prove God was behind these things were all proven true. What does this say, however, about the Philistines? How would you characterize their faith in the God of Israel?**

**Verse 13-16**

**What are the people of Beth-shemesh doing? \_\_\_\_\_**

**How did they respond to seeing the ark? \_\_\_\_\_**

**Where are we told the cart came to? \_\_\_\_\_**

**What did they do with the cart? \_\_\_\_\_**

**Who takes down the ark of the Lord from the cart (verse 15)? \_\_\_\_\_**

***Why is it not surprising that it was not just Jews, but specifically “Levites” who took possession of the ark?***

**Who are we told saw all of this? \_\_\_\_\_**

We aren't told of their reaction - only that they returned to Ekron that day.

**Verse 17-18**

We are told that each one of the gold tumors corresponded to five Philistine cities: Ashdod, Gaza, Ashkelon, Gath and Ekron

**What did the gold mice correspond to? \_\_\_\_\_**

**What is said about the stone where they placed the ark? \_\_\_\_\_**

**Verses 19-21**

**What are we told God did? \_\_\_\_\_**

**Why? \_\_\_\_\_**

The Ark of the Covenant was only to be touched and handled by specific Levites from the family of Kohath, and even they were commanded not to touch the ark itself (Numbers 4:15). The men of Beth-shemesh sinned not just because they touched the ark, but because they were looking inside it.

**How many men did he strike? \_\_\_\_\_**

Other translations say 70 men were struck down, which seems to be what the original text says. It is thought that it may mean that out of 50,000 men, 70 were killed. They mourn for the people who were struck down, and say, "Who is able to stand before the Lord, this holy God? And to whom will He go up from us?"

They are basically asking where the ark should be housed now that they have lost Shiloh and Eli's family is dead.

The people send a message to Kiriath-jearim. **What do they want them to do?**

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**What is startling about this last sign from God?**

**How might this be characterized differently from what the Philistines did?**

**What is the difference in the lesson to be learned by the Israelites than that learned by the Philistines?**

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Look at the entire sequence of events, which actually began in chapter 4:

- Eli's sons, Hophni and Phinehas, thought they could overcome their personal wickedness and achieve a victory by trusting in the ark. They misused the things of God and experienced God's judgment of death.
- Eli refused to discipline his sons who were misusing the things of God for personal gain and therefore experienced God's judgment of death.
- The Philistines treated the things of God like just any other things of their gods and experienced God's judgment of death.
- The Israelites of Beth-shemesh violated God's specific instructions to the contrary for His things and experienced God's judgment of death.

Every situation could have been resolved successfully if they had chosen to be obedient to the specific and narrow parameters of God's Word and ways. But regardless of one's heritage or standing, there is never a substitute for obedience to God's Word and ways.

**Application:**

- *Spiritual issues are always a reflection of the condition of one's heart, whether it is willing to repent and submit to the authority of God or is hardened in disobedience and therefore must experience God's escalating judgment.*
- *God will not reveal His power on behalf of His sinning people, but neither will an enemy be allowed to mock His glory or defile His name.*
- *God's signs always have a dual effect, either working to affirm the righteous or to bring judgment on the unrighteous.*
- *The repeated and continual rejection of God's signs and message inevitably leads to the wrath of God's judgment. The Philistines witnessed miraculous signs and wonders, but because they rejected their greater meaning, they were not transformed by them but suffered judgment because of them.*
- *The same consequences of God's judgment are experienced by everyone who does not submit to His authority, operate according to His Word, and treat Him as holy.*