

BOOK OF 1 SAMUEL
THE ABUSE AND RETURN OF THE ARK OF GOD
1 SAMUEL 4-6

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Introduction

I. WE'VE SEEN THAT THE ARK OF GOD WAS ABUSED BY GOD'S OWN PEOPLE, BUT GOD REFUSED TO ALLOW THE ARK TO BE USED AS THEIR GOOD LUCK CHARM! (4:4-7)

Instead of **searching their hearts** and **confessing their sins**, they decided they would take the Ark of the Covenant into battle with them! It would be like God Himself going with them!

We saw how their spiritual ignorance in Chapter 4 was profound as they both **regarded and used the Ark of the Covenant as a sort of good luck charm!**

The children of Israel either did not know or did not care to consider that the presence of the Ark, which was a physical symbol of God's presence, **would do them no good when their hearts were far from Him!**

Even today believers need to get over **the idea that God will somehow bless us in spite of our disobedience!**

The capture of the ark and its removal to the land of the Philistines only **symbolized what was already true and what had been true for a long time—the glory of God had departed from Israel.**

The Ark was about 4 ft long by 2 ft high and 2 ft. wide. The Ark was made of wood and overlaid with pure gold. On the top of the Ark was a solid slab of gold called the mercy seat and in the Ark was the tables of God's law. Out of the mercy seat were the Cherubim with their wings outstretched.

The Ark was the most sacred piece of furniture in the temple and it was kept in the holy of holies. It was so holy that it was kept behind a veil and only the high priest was allowed to look upon it once each year when he offered the sacrifice for the atonement for Israel's sins! (Leviticus 16).

But the Israelites sent for the ark and wanted it present with them.

It was not that they wanted the Ark that they might serve God or worship God or reverence God.

No, they wanted the presence of God for their own selfish purposes! **They were not seeking the will of God...They were not walking by faith... And they certainly were not seeking to glorify God!**

It was significant for Israel to learn that **they could not manipulate God by means of His Ark to give them victory when their hearts were not right with Him!**

A modern form of this is to see the promises of God as some kind of magical formula, *"If I do this, this and this, then God must do this..."*

We who have trusted the LORD for salvation need to learn that God is not like a holy maid service that we can just call upon to clean up our messes. He did not allow Israel to use Him that way, and he won't let us either!

Are we putting God first in our lives or are we just calling on God when everything else we've tried has failed us?

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II. WE'VE SEEN THAT THE ARK OF GOD WAS ABUSED BY THE PHILISTINES, BUT GOD NEEDED NO HELP DEFENDING HIMSELF AGAINST THEM! (5:1-12)

Yes, the Philistines had captured the Ark, but God was in control and allowed it to happen to teach both His people some things and to draw them back to Him as well as to teach the Philistines some things!

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In fact the Philistines learned soon enough that the Ark, like God's written Word, was designed as a comfort and encouragement to His people but not to His enemies!

When the Philistines got what they THOUGHT they wanted, they came to realize rather quickly that they DID NOT REALLY WANT what they had!

So we see that God used the Ark to teach both the Jews and the Philistines some important lessons.

The Philistines mistakenly believed that their god had helped them to conquer the God of the Israelites when they seized the Ark of the Covenant!

They also mistakenly believed that the God of Israel was inferior to their god Dagon after all!

Understand that the Philistines were used to serving many gods. They knew the God of the Israelites had great power, so what did they do with the Ark of the Covenant?

Chapter five begins telling us they disrespected the Ark of God by putting it in their heathen temple along side one of their gods, Dagon!

Of course, if the LORD would punish His people, Israel, for abusing the Ark of the Covenant, you can rest assured, He was going to send judgment on those who were not His people when they abused it!

Today we live in a wicked world where people make mockery of the LORD's Church, God's man, and God's word and the other things of God and they don't think twice about doing so!

People think nothing will happen to them no matter how much they mock God, but God has not changed! He does not need man to defend Him, He can defend Himself!

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A. What Were The Sins Of The Philistines!

1. They Refused To Recognize That There Is Only One God! (vs 2)

It had been the will of God to bring His own people to their knees, and He used the Philistines to accomplish His purpose.

It had been neither the valor of the Philistine army nor the might of their god which had won the battle for them.

2. They Tried To Put The Living God Of Heaven On The Same Level As A Dead Idol!

Man could not insult God any more than to take some kind of man-made idol and even begin to compare it, or place it beside the Ark of the God of heaven!

That is the same as looking God in the face and telling Him that He is no better or worse than a piece of wood or stone which He created to begin with.
(Isaiah 40:18-25; Jeremiah 10:1-16)

Anytime we put anything ahead of the LORD or beside the LORD we are essentially doing the same thing the Philistines did and we can rightfully expect the displeasure of God upon such things in our lives!

B. How Did God Defend Himself And Show He Was More Powerful Than Dagon? (vs 3-5)

God displayed His power by knocking Dagon, off of his perch!

The Philistines discovered Dagon on the floor and picked him up and put him back on his throne.

I am glad that we serve a God that picks us up, instead of our having to pick Him up!

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The next morning they rose early only to find Dagon had been thrown down again and was laying all broken up before the Ark of the LORD!

C. How Did God Defend Himself Against The Worshipers Of The Idol? (vs 6-12)

When God chose to defend himself against those heathens He sent "*emerods*." Those were large boils that caused great swelling and suffering!

Now at this point they had to begin to wonder if they had the Hebrew God in their hands or if it is the other way around!

The Philistines should have forsaken Dagon and began serving the LORD! After all, what kind of a god has to be set upright by its subjects and carried off for repairs because it is broken?

The Philistines could have and should have gotten rid of Dagon and theirs sins but they chose rather to get rid of the Ark of God and their plagues!

Though they recognized that it was the God of the Israelites hand upon them they still refused to repent.

We could say they went through all the pain without any gain!

Verse 6 reveals that the Lord not only humiliated the god of the Philistines but he also judged the people who worshiped this false god.

It is apparent that the leaders finally came to realize that the plague that they were suffering was due to the presence of the Ark in their midst!

So they took the Ark from Ashdod to Gath (**vv.8-9**); from Gath to Ekron (**v. 10**); but they soon discovered that this plague of emerods broke out wherever the Ark was taken.

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So they made the decision to send the ark back to Israel (**v. 11**), but not without one last test (**6:7**).

So, while the Philistines did see the plague as the hand of God as judgment for having the ark in their midst, they do not reject their powerless god, nor do they trust in the God of Israel and worship Him. They very simply want God out of their town.

They clung to the possibility that all of these disasters "could" just have been bad luck.

If they could prove that calamities were all coincidence, they could keep the ark and continue to magnify Dagon's superiority over Jehovah.

In 6:7-9, the Philistines outline the scheme they think will test the God of Israel one last time.

When you consider that these cows were nursing their calves, that the cows had never drawn a cart before, the Philistines had the deck nicely stacked in their favor.

The odds were with them that these cows would never pull this cart down the road to the nearest Israelite town of Beth-Shemesh. They thought they had all the angles figured out.

But they had not counted on it really being the LORD! (Vs 12)

The Philistines did not know the true and living God but the cows did and they obeyed Him.

III. WE SEE THAT GOD REFUSES TO BE TREATED WITH DISDAIN! (6:13-15, 19-21)

When the ark arrived in Beth-Shemesh it should have been covered IMMEDIATELY! It was not suppose to be seen by anyone except the high priest.

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But some of these men had the audacity to go as far as looking inside the Ark of the LORD!

If the pagan Philistines were judged for the way they unknowingly treated the Ark, how much more does God hold accountable those who new the law and were living in a Levitical (priestly) city and treated the Ark as common rather than holy?

The awesome event described here certainly would seem to warn us today against a lack of reverence for the things of God.

Two Abiding Principles

1. While God does not live in our Church buildings or in any of its furnishings we still should show respect for things dedicated or set apart to the glory of God.
2. We do not have the Ark to present the presence of God today, we have the Son of God, and he deserves His rightful place of preeminence in our hearts and we have the Spirit of God living in our hearts and desiring to fill our lives!