

## The Ark: Prostrate

*The Ark*

By Dr. Jeff Meyers

**Bible Text:** 1 Samuel 5:1-12; Matthew 24:5-12

**Preached on:** Sunday, July 15, 2012

I am about to read 1 Samuel 5 is about to share with us and let me warn you in advance. Some of the most graphic language in all of the Bible is about to be used. Trust me, you will know when we get there. 1 Samuel chapter five, 12 simple verses.

And the Philistines took the ark of God, and brought it from Ebenezer unto Ashdod. When the Philistines took the ark of God, they brought it into the house of Dagon, and set it by Dagon. And when they of Ashdod arose early on the morrow, behold, Dagon was fallen upon his face to the earth before the ark of the LORD. And they took Dagon, and set him in his place again. And when they arose early on the morrow morning, behold, Dagon was fallen upon his face to the ground before the ark of the LORD; and the head of Dagon and both the palms of his hands were cut off upon the threshold; only the stump of Dagon was left to him. Therefore neither the priests of Dagon, nor any that come into Dagon's house, tread on the threshold of Dagon in Ashdod unto this day.

But the hand of the LORD was heavy upon them of Ashdod, and he destroyed them, and smote them with emerods, even Ashdod and the coasts thereof. And when the men of Ashdod saw that it was so, they said, The ark of the God of Israel shall not abide with us: for his hand is sore upon us, and upon Dagon our god. They sent therefore and gathered all the lords of the Philistines unto them, 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 about unto Gath. And they carried the ark of the God of Israel about thither. And it was so, that, after they had carried it about, the hand of the LORD was against the city with a very great destruction: and he smote the men of the city, both small and great, and they had emerods in their secret parts. Therefore they sent the ark of God to Ekron. And it came to pass, as the ark of God came to Ekron, that the Ekronites cried out, saying, They have brought about the ark of the God of Israel to us, to slay us and our people. 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 again to his own place, that it slay us not, and our people: for there was a deadly destruction throughout all the city; the hand of God was very heavy there. And the men that died not were smitten with the emerods: and the cry of the city went up to heaven.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> 1 Samuel 5:1-12.

What this passage says, in summary is this, then we will dig into the details. That when a community, when a culture, when a country, when a group of people who are not classified as the children of God, when they encounter the presence of God in their life and they reject the presence of God in their lives, there is but one result and that is the judgment of God upon their lives as individuals, as families, great and small, and even as entire communities. The judgment of God fell.

So how is it? What can we learn from this passage? Because you and I, last time I checked, we are not in Israel. Last time I checked we are not classified as the seed of David and of Abraham. We are a part of a culture that is classified as western civilization. That is specifically, no matter where you originally come from, here we are known as the "United States of America," one of 196 official countries in the world. And what happens when God tries to get a group of people's attention and they heed not his message? One thing. Judgment.

So how does this happen? How does a group of people, how does a culture, how does a country, how does a group of people get the judgment of God upon them? What happens in their lives to get them to that point? Three things happen. The first one is this. they ignore the past. They ignore the reality of the past.

I want you to look in verse three. Dagon, who, by the way, if you go do your research is an inanimate object made of clay, metal, various substances. He basically looks like a mermaid from the waist down and a man from the waist up. He was in Ashdod. We will talk about in a moment that he was in the book of Judges 16. He was that god of the Philistines that they tied Samson close to.

That being said, he was inanimate, he was large, he was massive and he was structurally sound until the presence of God showed up. And the presence of God came and this inanimate object bowed down. Yes, he bowed down. Here is the problem with verse three. What did they do at the end of verse three? The culture put him back up. In other words, they did not heed what was happening. They did not recognize that that which was from God is ok and that which is made by man is bowing down to the presence of God. They did not pay attention to what was going on and you and I, we live in a culture today that is rapidly ignoring our past in regard to this measure. There have been times in our culture's life where we have bowed our idols to God. There have been times in our existence where we have heeded the message of Jesus Christ in our life and said, "We desperately need God in our lives."

The problem is over the course of time we have propped the idols back up. Allow me to share with you some of the history that will not be shared in the school districts, that will not be shared on the airwaves of this great nation. Before we even became a country, before we declared independence, before we signed the Constitution, before we elected our first president in 1776 what we know as the colonies, what we know as the United States before they were United States was a place of rampant sin. It was a place of ill regard and little regard for Jesus Christ until 1720 when what we know as the first Great Awakening was initiated. It started in the middle colonies. It went to the upper colonies.

It concluded down in the south where we are in the southern colonies. What happened was for about 36 to 37 years in town after town, county after county, state after state what was seen was a steady falling down before the Lord.

One of the climactic events of that year was in 1741 when a man by the name of Jonathan Edwards, a congregational pastor stood up in front of his congregation and began to preach from Deuteronomy chapter 32. Before he even got to the invitation people were laying prostrate on the ground saying, “We have sinned, oh God.” And what happened is in those days they took the idols and they cast them down and they took their lives that were in rebellion to God and they cast them down.

But here was the problem. By the time we got about 100 years down the road they started propping them up again. They started thinking, we are smart enough. They started thinking we are intelligent enough. They started thinking it is about feeding the flesh. It is about enjoying this thing called by life. And by the time you get to 1857 the metropolis, the mega center of the United States still could probably reign as king, that which of New York City, was one of the most diabolical and disastrous places known in the ethical, moral community. There were more bars than churches, more pagans than believers. It was a royal mess until one day when a man by the name of Lamphier got desperate for the presence of God and his New York City’s life. He went up to the top of the old Dutch Reformed Church in the middle of the day at noon and he started to pray. He was joined by other believers.

Let me fast forward to you 18 months later, over one million people—men, women, boys, girls—had come to know Jesus Christ as their personal Lord and Savior. What happened was a mark of revival, places of ill repute were shut down and turned into places of worship. Places to celebrate the flesh were closed down and places to celebrate the Spirit of God were erected in their place. And there was a complete total transformation of the culture. Why? Because the idols were cast down.

But then there was a problem. Some years later we did the same pattern again. We decided to take the idols and we decided to erect them. We decided that it was more fun to enjoy the flesh than the Spirit of God. We decided it was more fun to experience lasciviousness than holiness. In those days of the early to mid 1900s some of the most famous evangelists ever known to this civilization, Chapman, Sunday and others got up night after night, tent after tent and they shared the fact that if we do not repent, if we do not confess, if we do not go prostrate before an almighty, all holy God, there is but one thing that we will experience and it is that of judgment.

The problem is this. Since those days there have been pockets of renewal. There have been pockets of revival, but I dare say that we live in a culture today that the idols are definitely brought up again. We live in a world today at least here in the United States of America, that Humanism, intellect, our own pulling ourselves up by the bootstraps, we have propped it up and we said, “We will not, as a culture bow down to God. We will not bow down to anybody but ourselves and what we want.”

Listen. We are ignoring our past. In the past when we as a culture received the blessings of God, the hand of God, the prosperity of God, it did not happen when we brought the idols up. It happened when we allowed them to fall in his presence. And the problem with us is that we do not learn from history.

What is the one thing we are guaranteed to learn from history? Not to learn from it. And if you look at our nation, you look at our country, you look at this culture's history, the times in which God truly blessed us were not in our days of rebellion, but in our days of repentance. It was not in our day of self assurance, but it was in our days of self denial.

See, the problem is we have become much like them by ignoring the past. They just propped it up when it was falling down. But I dare say it is not just about our past. We have also become much like 1 Samuel five. We are ignoring the present.

I want you to look down in verse four of this passage. It says: "And when they arose early on the morrow morning, behold, Dagon was fallen upon his face to the ground before the ark of the LORD; and the head of Dagon and both the palms of his hands were cut off upon the threshold; only the stump of Dagon was left to him."<sup>2</sup>

In other words, that which they built up, listen to me, had begun to crumble apart. Their idols were no longer as strong as they used to be. Their idols were no longer as sufficient as they used to be. And what happens in our lives and in any culture's life is if we keep propping up the idols, eventually they will crumble upon their own weight. How are we ignoring the idols of our present?

I want you to turn to Matthew chapter 24 in the New Testament. This is a very famous chapter in the Bible. It is what we call an eschatological chapter about the end times. Jesus is but just a short time period from going to the cross and giving his life as a ransom for any and all the Bible says that are sinners. He is there on what we know as the Mount of Olives. The disciples, the apostles are gathered around him and in the beginning of Matthew 24 they ask him some very important questions. What will the sign of his coming be and what will the end of the world look like?

In Matthew chapter 24 Jesus begins to discuss all of these famous end time events that so wonderfully dovetail with the book of Daniel in the Old Testament and the book of Revelation in the New Testament. I am not here today to discuss the chronology of Matthew 24, though I would love to do so at one time. I am not here to dissect word for word and phrase by phrase everything that Jesus shared. What I want to show you is that we truly are today closer to the return of Jesus than we were yesterday, because our culture, our communities, our world at large are beginning to eerily imitate the things that Jesus said would occur in Mathew chapter 24. And what I want to discuss are some of the idols that are breaking apart, but no one wants to admit that they are broken.

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<sup>2</sup> 1 Samuel 5:4.

Before we get to Matthew chapter 24, though, let me digress just a bit. I mentioned earlier about the book of Judges chapter 16, The story of a man by the name of Samson, a man who was strengthened not by his muscles, but by his hair and his obedience to God. He falls upon a young lady by the name of Delilah. That is just a relationship that just turns into a complete train wreck. At the end of the relationship he confesses that if his hair is cut he will lose his strength. The next day he wakes up. The Philistines are upon him. The Bible says he is not able to shake them like he has been able to in the past. And it says that they tied him to the post of the temple of Dagon, the idol that we are speaking of here. He is between the two posts and the Bible says his hair begins to grow back. And in verse 30 of Judges chapter 16 it says that he prayed to God, “Remember me this one time.” And it says he bowed his head, he pulled his arms and the pillars fell and the roof fell and more Philistines died in that day than all of Samson’s career combined.

You say, “Jeff, why is that so important to Matthew chapter 24?”

Is it possible or could it be that the idol that we have in 1 Samuel 5 is the same idol they had in Judges 16? Could it be that this is the same inanimate object? Let me share with you something. When one of those massive temples comes falling down, the brick, the mortar, the concrete, whatever they made it out of, wouldn’t it just stand to reason that as that idol was standing upright that the head and the hands would have taken the brunt of the blow? And so what happened in these Philistines lives is what happens in our lives. It is possible that they took those idols that were falling apart and glued them back together, ignoring the cracks in the threshold, ignoring the reality of what it is, for what they desire it to be.

That being said, as we turn to Matthew chapter 24, I want to share with you some items that are happening in our lives today that I think are nothing more and nothing less than us just gluing the idols back together. Verse five of Matthew 24. “For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many.”<sup>3</sup>

One of the idols that we have in our culture is the idol of power: Those who are in power, those who possess power. Do you know what we have started doing in our culture today? And I know I am getting somewhat on a soapbox, but it literally is gluing the idol back together, is we have become a community, a culture, we have become a country in which it doesn’t matter the baggage that a man or woman brings. It doesn’t matter their lifestyle. It doesn’t matter their ethics. It doesn’t matter their values. It doesn’t matter their morals. If they will just give me what I want to get, glue them back together and stick them out on the forefront again. That is exactly what is happening to Matthew 24.

Jesus said, “There will come those who will deceive you, the powers that will say, ‘I am worth putting back on the forefront again just because I will give you what you want.’”

And it is not an American problem, guys. It is a global problem. We live in a world today where we get promised everything and we get delivered nothing. What do we do? Glue it back together and see how it works.

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<sup>3</sup> Matthew 24:5.

There is a second item listed in verse seven of Matthew 24. It says: “For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places.”<sup>4</sup>

We live in a world today that shares with us that we consistently are under the barrage of “plagues.” They call them natural disasters. They call them struggles. They call them problems. Whether it be hurricanes, typhoons, tidal waves, whatever these things may be. And you know what I am told? And, by the way, let me be real careful for those of you who have a scientific background. My dad is a scientist. I get that. I am not dismissing that humanity can have a little bit of a thumb print in all of these scenarios, but do you honestly think that doubling the miles per gallon on my car is going to stop hurricanes? I mean, think about that for a moment. I am not against higher gas mileage. I am not against going green. The problem is it is glue and what we are doing is we are saying, “Well, we will just change how we do this and change how we do that.”

If you study the history of humanity, we have had a lot of “plagues” throughout the years and ages and we fall into this same trap of saying, “Let’s just glue it together with a new idea and a new solution and maybe it won’t happen again.”

Look what Jesus said. He said, “Guys, there is are going to be things happening in places you cannot explain. So quit trying to glue it together.”

You get to verse 10. And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another. And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many.<sup>5</sup>

This is one of the things that Jesus talks about to those who, by the way are his disciples. He says, “There will rise up those who will persecute you.”

There has been a new book written. I will confess to you I have not read the contents yet, but I have read the abstract and the title is good enough for me. It says, *The Intolerance of Tolerance*. We live in a world today that will tolerate anything but Jesus. We will tolerate any book but the Bible. And yet we are told that we are in the land of equality. We are told we are in the land of equal opportunity. We are told we are in the land of everybody gets their fair share. And understand there are pockets of problems in all areas, guys. I understand that, but we would have to recognize that every religious leader, every false belief system, every “holy book” outside of the Bible has carte blanche access to our culture except Jesus Christ. And that is who we have become. What we have done is we have started saying, “Let’s just glue the hands back on. Let’s just glue the head back on because we don’t want to deal with or address these issues.”

Do you see the common theme here? Whether it is those that are in power, the plagues around us or the persecutions. We are just gluing our idols back together.

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<sup>4</sup> Matthew 24:7.

<sup>5</sup> Mathew 24:10-11.

But there is one last one here I want to address in Matthew 24 verse 12. “And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold.”<sup>6</sup>

And I think the biggest idol that we are gluing back together is what I call the idol of passivity, just sitting back saying, “Surely it is just going to work itself out.” I mean, after all, we are the land of the free and the home of the brave. It will just naturally work itself out. And we have gotten this mentality that if we are just passive, it will just work out. And the problem with verse 12 is that he in context is speaking to the believers. He is speaking to the apostles. And what he is basically saying is that the Church as a whole today has started doing the same thing the world has done. We have started gluing our idols back together. We are starting to say, “Oh, it is not that big a deal even though baptisms have been on an eight year decline. We are not in that big of a mess.”

Yes, we are.

Even though giving is at record lows since the Great Depression, it is not that big of a problem. Yes, it is.

Because the Church of Jesus Christ as a whole has said, “I don’t have to be active in my faith. I don’t have to propagate my faith. I will just kind of hang in there and everything is going to work out.”

The problem about ignoring our present is that we are doing it by ignoring our past and recognizing that the only time that we would be blessed, the only time that God took care of us as a culture was when we went prostrate before the presence of God, not fighting against him.

We are ignoring the past. We are ignoring the present, but if we go back to 1 Samuel chapter five we have become a people and a culture and a community that we are definitively ignoring the future. What I mean by that is this. Because we are ignoring the past, because we are ignoring the present, we are not putting things in place to change, for the better and for the glory of God, the future. Rather, by allowing things to continue the way they are, they will only get worse.

You go back to 1 Samuel chapter five beginning in verse five. This group of people in Ashdod realized that they had a really bad problem. This is not good. We don’t want this. We don’t need it. The Bible says they have emerods in their secret parts. This can’t be good. I don’t care how you slice, dice it or talk about it. That is just painful. Well, that is not good, ok? And do you know what they said? Let’s give it to the next city.

Isn't that a great idea? Let’s take the problem and give it to somebody else. And so they go over to Gath and say, “Hey, guys, got a great present for you.”

Now remember, the emerods in the secret parts, right? Nobody can see it on the outside. We have got this great box we think you need to have. Can you imagine the phone call

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<sup>6</sup> Matthew 24:12.

from the mayor of Gath back to the mayor of Ashdod about 24 hours after that box was delivered going, "What did you do to us?"

And do you know what Gath did? Let's give it to Ekron. We will find out next week that they passed what we know as the ark of the covenant to five different cities. And I think the biggest struggle I have and the biggest problem that I have with us ignoring not just the past, the present and the future, is that we have become communities, we have become a culture and we have become a country that says, "Rather than repenting, rather than laying prostrate before an all holy God, let's just pass it to the next generation. Let's just pass it to another group. Let's just pass it to another country."

And as you study verses five through 12, the picture, the idea that you get is that rather than heeding the judgment of God in their life and recognizing I don't want this to happen in my kids' life, my neighbor's life, my community's life, they allow it to happen in everybody's life.

I want to share with you a story that took place in my life over 20 years ago. This story does not involve my wife Traci, nor does it involve her family. She is completely aware of me sharing this story with you. Nothing hidden, nothing secret. In fact, she has met all the individuals involved in this story.

I was 16 years of age. I had just gotten the key to freedom, it is called a driver's license. I had a car that actually worked. I had the freedom. I had the ability to go on a date. That is why I asked Tracy's permission to tell this story. You all understand that, right?

There was a young lady in my school. We had met some weeks earlier. We had formed an affinity for one another and we had started that pre dating scenario. I was going out with groups and going out with our church, yes. When I say going out with our church, they were active in a part of our church body. You are probably going to need to remember that when I get to the end of the story.

So we began to do all those things. I turned 16 years of age and then all of the sudden we could go out by ourselves. We could go on a date.

And we had gone on several. Nothing had materialized. Listen to me. This relationship was not serious in any form or fashion. It was your sweet little innocent high school romance. That is all it was. But I will never forget the day. I hadn't been 16 maybe three or four weeks. I pulled up in the driveway of this young lady's house. That night I was going to take her out on another proverbial date. The normal routine was I would get out of the car. I would go to the front door. I would ring the doorbell. I would say my condolences to, you know, her mom or dad and then we would go.

This night, though, as soon as I drove into the driveway they heard me, you know, three blocks down. As soon as I got in the driveway she met me at the driveway and she had the absolute look of panic on her face. And I said, "What is going on?"



She said, "I don't know what has happened, but they want to talk to you."

Hey. Guys, I got a clear conscience. Nothing was happening. I am good. I mean, this is before Facebook. I said nothing to nobody. Ok? Life is good. I am guilty of nothing. And so I marched right on in the house with a humble spirit, but with an upright conscience. And there was her mom and her dad and she had the absolute sheer look of panic, because she knew what was about to happen. Her mom and dad... we had been dating maybe a month, maybe five weeks, went to church together. Remember that. And they began to share with me that they understood what it was like being 16 years of age. They understood what it was like being tempted by all kind of things in life. And so, so that we would not experience the same things they experienced when they were our age, they were making available anything that we wanted from an intimate perspective to keep things from happening.

Did that communicate to you? Do I need to be more graphic like was in...? No, no, no. Why on earth would a set of parents tell me instead of changing and instead of repenting, instead of altering your life, just experience the same thing with a few more protective measures.

Listen. Do you realize that our entire culture is doing that? Do you know what we are telling young people? Just do what you want to do, just don't get in trouble. Do anything you want. Live life the way you desire it, but keep all consequences at a minimum. And do you know what we are doing? The same thing they did in chapter five. They are just passing it to Gath. And just passing it to Ekron. And pretty soon you don't just have a city. You have an entire culture that is experiencing what we just read.

And do you know what my concern about the future is? We are ignoring the future by not communicating to the next generation, by not communicating to those who are younger than us, not communicating to them, that if they want the blessings and the hope of God in their life, it doesn't come with feeding the flesh, it comes with going prostrate and completely before God almighty himself.

Listen. Deliverance and change and life abundantly do not come through the feeding of the flesh. It comes by repenting and saying, "Jesus, I desperately need you in my life."

The problem of 1 Samuel five is that we have ignored all the warning signs. When the answer is right before them. And the answer is right before us.

What did Dagon do? He fell down.

Philippians chapter two, Revelation chapter 20. Do you know what it says? Every knee will bow. Every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.

Let me give you a word of advice. Whoever you are, wherever you come from, whatever you are doing in life, every one of you listening to my voice is going to bow down to

Jesus one day. The question is: When you get up from bowing down where will you go for eternity? To those who have bowed now, to a place the Bible calls heaven. To those who refuse now to a place the Bible calls hell.

Listen. You will bow down. Dagon showed you and our culture is also ignorant of this. Every other culture that man has known through the history of the world that has rejected the things of God, has ceased to be when they started to be the warning signs are every where, individually, as a family, a community and a culture. The sad part is Dagon is fallen. His head has rolled off. His hands are off and everybody is rushing to get the super glue.