

“God Will Not Remain Silent” PART 1 (1 Samuel 5)

The Philistines have taken the ark back to their capital city at Ashdod following the battle at Ebenezer where Hophni and Phinehas were killed, along with 30,000 soldiers. Eli has fallen off his chair, broken his neck (4:18), and his grandson, Ichabod, will grow up without father, mother, uncle, grandmother, or grandfather. Ichabod, representative of Israel, is living in a world without the ark of God. Both Ichabod and Israel are orphans in this dark world.

1. The Showdown at Ashdod among the Philistines (v.1-5)

- **Dagon:** He was the highest ranking of all the Philistine gods (Judges 16:23; 1 Chronicles 10:10). Ugaritic texts refer to Dagon as being the father of Baal. Some link Dagon to a Northwest Semitic word that equates to grain or cloud/rain. He is essentially a sexual/fertility deity.
- The ark is a trophy. What’s more, they placed the ark of God in front of Dagon to not only show which nation had triumphed, but whose god had won.
- Many of the pagan nations believed that when they would go to war, it was not just the people who fought; their god (or gods) also fought one another as well.
- The subject of the verbs “captured it, brought it, set it up, and took up” indicate that the Philistines think they have taken the god of Israel as a “passive prisoner” who is powerless.
- By placing the ark beside Dagon, they believe the LORD is now going to be “serving” Dagon.
- The Philistines think that they can add the “god of Israel” to their collection without homage or fear.

Scene 1: The ark of God is placed next to, or in front of Dagon (v.2)

Scene 2: Dagon has fallen face first onto the ground in front of the ark of God (v.3)

- Dagon, the supposed ultimate, powerful deity, is bowing with face to the ground in front of the ark of God. Dagon is paying homage to the LORD.
- The face to the ground is indicative of humble submission and an acknowledgment of the LORD’s superiority (Genesis 17:7, 17, 19:1, 24:52; Nehemiah 8:6).
- The people of Ashdod pick Dagon’s face off the ground and put him back in his place. Their god that was so “virile” on the battlefield was too weak and powerless to pick his face out of the dirt in his own temple.
- The people wonder whether Dagon has fallen dead (Deut. 22:4) or if he has fallen prostrate in obeisance (Esther 7:8). They are curious and a bit excited to see what would happen next, which is why they rise “early the next morning.”

Scene 3: His head, as well as his two hands were lying on the threshold (v.4)

- This mirrored a common practice performed on the corpses of slain enemies: their heads and hands would be taken as trophies of that military conquest or just cut off and left on the battlefield (1 Sam 17:51; 31:9; 2 Sam 4:12).

- Dagon has been defeated by the God of Israel. God throws the idols to the ground. What does the LORD do? He slays Dagon.
- Dagon’s humiliating act of self-abasement was repeated the following morning, a sure sign that the previous day’s events had not been “accidental.” Since the hand was a symbol of power (Judges 6:13; Jeremiah 12:7), God cut them off. Dagon is no longer recognizable because he is headless and handless.

Threshold (v.5): Temple thresholds (Zephaniah 1:4-9) were viewed as entry points into the underworld and treated with care. Various kinds of spirits, or demons that had been appeased by the pagan people who wanted to enter or leave a house, were thought to lie beneath the thresholds. Since Dagon is face down in the dirt, he was believed to have begun his journey to the underworld, making this threshold especially dangerous. A person stepping on the threshold might put pressure on the heads of the spirits or demons contained in it, and by doing so, irritate them. The spirits were then believed to inflict pain on the offender. In order to avoid this superstitious act, people would step or literally leap over the threshold, which was a practice condemned as pagan by the prophet Zephaniah (1:9). This threshold has now become taboo because the severed head and hands of Dagon landed on it.

2. The Stupidity and Asininity of the Philistines (v.3-7)

- The Philistines still worshipped Dagon, even though he was without power. Despite the true God showing evidence of His authority, these embarrassed priests put Dagon back up after the second scene and still worship him after the third.
- Our culture continues to do the same. Despite the LORD tearing down the “humpty-dumpties” of modernism and postmodernism, man keeps putting the “Dagons” back up. Three areas of God’s Word that have been under assault:

A. **Family:** In 1968, 12% of children lived with a single mother. Today, it is over 20%. In 1997, 3½% of children lived with parents who “co-habitate.” Today, it is 7%. In 1965, 85% of children lived with married parents. Today, it is 65%. Half of all marriages end in divorce. 62% of all black children grow up without a father involved in their life.

B. **Marriage:** This culture has defined its own standard for marriage, despite the God-given mandate that it is between one man and one woman (Genesis 2:24-25; Matthew 19:4-5).

C. **Sexuality:** The demand for celebration of homosexuality has increased dramatically over the last 30 years despite explicit warnings in Scripture (Romans 1:18-32; 1 Corinthians 6:9-10; 1 Timothy 1:10). There is undisputable evidence regarding the physical, mental and emotional consequences of such a lifestyle. Still, man wants to keep Dagon in its place. Dagon was primarily a sexual god.

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