

## 1 Samuel Chapter 5

### **1 Samuel 5:1 "And the Philistines took the ark of God, and brought it from Ebenezer unto Ashdod."**

"Ashdod" was one of the five principal Philistine cities (compare the note at Joshua 13:2-3). The other cities included: Gath (verse 8), Ekron (verse 10), Ashkelon (6:17), and Gaza (6:17), all of which were located in southwestern Canaan near the Mediterranean seacoast.

We remember, from a previous lesson, that Ebenezer was where the Israelite camp was. Now that Israel has lost the battle and the Philistines killed the priests, the Philistines have taken the Ark. The following is probably speaking of this same thing.

Psalms 78:60-64 "So that he forsook the tabernacle of Shiloh, the tent [which] he placed among men;" "And delivered his strength into captivity, and his glory into the enemy's hand." "He gave his people over also unto the sword; and was wroth with his inheritance." "The fire consumed their young men; and their maidens were not given to marriage." "Their priests fell by the sword; and their widows made no lamentation."

Ashdod was one of the five most important cities of the Philistines.

Verses 2-5: "Dagon" was the father of the god Baal and was thought to supply both harvest and fertility (Judges 16:23-30). The capture of an enemy's god showed that the enemy was utterly conquered. Placing the "Ark of God," in the temple of their main god was the Philistines' way of displaying their god's supremacy. But the Lord had the final word, for He will not be mocked.

### **1 Samuel 5:2 "When the Philistines took the ark of God, they brought it into the house of Dagon, and set it by Dagon."**

"Dagon": Ancient literature identifies this deity as a fish god, whose image had the lower body of a fish and the upper body of a man. Dagon seems to have been the leader of the Philistine pantheon (Judges 16:23), and is noted to be the father of Baal. The placing of the Ark of God in the temple of Dagon was supposed to be a sign of Dagon's power and Yahweh's inferiority, a visual representation that the god of the Philistines was victorious over the God of the Hebrews. In addition, the textual connection of Dagon reinforces the affinity between the events written here and those in the life of Samson (Judges Chapters 13-16).

For "Dagon" (see the note on Judges 16:23).

Dagon was the Philistine false god of fertility of the earth. The statue of this false god was a man to the waist and a fish to the tail. The tail of the fish symbolized the need for water to a bountiful crop. The Ark symbolized the presence of God. To put the Ark by the side of this false god is blasphemous.

**1 Samuel 5:3 "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."**

“Fallen upon his face”: Ironically, God Himself overturned the supposed supremacy of Dagon by having Dagon fallen over, as if paying homage to the Lord.

Even this false god, Dagon, had to bow to the presence of the One True God. The people should have realized why this happened, but they did not. They set this statue of the false god up again, at the side of the Ark. The false god had fallen down prostrate before the symbol of the LORD, the Ark.

**1 Samuel 5:4 "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."**

“Head ... hands were cut off”: The first display of God’s authority over Dagon was not perceived. God’s second display of authority, the cutting off of Dagon’s head and hands, was a common sign that the enemy was dead (Judges 7:25; 8:6; 1 Sam. 17:54; 31:9; 2 Sam. 4:12), and was to be understood as God’s divine judgment on the false idol.

This was an interesting thing to happen. The head and the palms were not broken off, but cut off. Not only were they cut off, but placed at the entrance of the threshold, where all who entered would have to see them. This completely defames this false god. It not only destroys his existence (cut off head), but destroys any work he might do (the palms of the hands). This false god had been defamed and dismembered by the presence of the Spirit within the Ark.

**1 Samuel 5:5 "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."**

“Tread on the threshold”: Because the head and hands of Dagon fell on the threshold, superstition developed that it was cursed; therefore, the Philistines would not tread on it.

“Unto this day”: This phrase supports the claim that the writer was living at a time removed from the actual event itself. This phrase and phrases equivalent to it are found throughout 1 and 2 Samuel (1 Sam. 6:18; 26:6; 30:25; 2 Sam. 4:3; 6:8; 18:18).

These evil people did not even stop worshipping this false god after this happened. They just stopped walking on the threshold of the entrance of the place they worshipped. They are so blind.

Verses 6-12: God struck the Philistines with “tumors” for stealing the Ark. The early Latin manuscripts also include statements about rats springing up all over the city (6:4), causing panic and death. Some commentators have conjectured the bubonic plague.

**1 Samuel 5:6 "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."**

“The hand of the Lord was heavy”: In contrast to the hands of Dagon being cut off, symbolizing his helplessness against the power of Yahweh, the Lord was pictured to be actively involved in judging the Philistines. The imagery of God’s hand is found throughout the Ark narrative (4:8; 5:6-7, 9, 11; 6:3, 5 9).

“Emerods”: It has been suggested that this word refers to the sores or boils caused by an epidemic of the bubonic plague carried by rats (6:4-5). The spread of the disease and its deadly effect (5:6, 9, 12; 6:11, 17), make this a likely view.

Various conjectures have been made for the Hebrew word translated “emerods”. Josephus suggested that the problem stemmed from dysentery, a suggestion also made as a marginal reading in the Hebrew text. The consonantal text reads a word meaning “swellings,” “boils” or “tumors.” Accordingly, most commentators since Martin Luther have held that the disease involved here was bubonic plague (see the note on 6:4-5).

This is a plague that God sent upon these evil people. "Emerods" means tumors. Some believe they were tumorous hemorrhoids. In some other places, it means eating ulcers, or the diseases of Egypt. It really does not matter what it was, it was terrible enough to kill many of them.

**1 Samuel 5:7 "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."**

Now their eyes were opened to see that, though they had vanquished the Israelites, they could not stand before the God of Israel.

“For his hand is sore upon us, and upon Dagon, our god”: Not the hand of the Ark, unless they took it for a god, but the hand of the God of Israel; in this they were right, and seem to have understood the case better than the other lords they after consulted. His hand was upon Dagon, as appeared his fall before the Ark and upon them by smiting with the hemorrhoids (bleeding piles known to the ancient Romans as marisca, but more probably malignant boils of an infectious and fatal character).

They have finally realized that this and the problem with their false god are because they have the Ark of God. They would like to get rid of the Ark of God and perhaps the plague will leave. They do recognize that the God of Israel has brought this upon them. It does look like they would realize that Dagon is a false god, but they do not.

**1 Samuel 5:8 "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]."**

“Lords of the Philistines”: Refers to those men who ruled the chief Philistine cities as kings (see note on 4:1).

“Let the Ark ... be carried ... unto Gath”: They seem to have been possessed with a superstitious conceit that there was something in the place which was offensive to the God of Israel, and therefore removed the Ark from Ashdod, to which and its coasts they supposed the plague, for some particular reasons, was confined. Or they thought it had come upon them by chance, or for putting the Ark into Dagon’s temple, which they resolved they would not do.

“Gath”: Another main Philistine city, located about 12 miles east of Ashdod (5:1).

This is another of the 5 most important cities of the Philistines. Philistia was governed by 5 princes. These 5 main cities were the headquarters of these princes. The Philistines would like to keep the Ark, as long as it is in some other city, except their own.

**1 Samuel 5:9 "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."**

And at last it was placed it in the city of Gath.

"The hand of the Lord was against the city with a very great destruction": Greater than that at Ashdod, more persons were destroyed; the distemper sent among them was more epidemic and mortal.

"And he smote the men of the city, both small and great": High and low, persons of every class, rank, and station, young and old, men, women, and children.

They had emerods in their secret (or hidden) parts, That is, internally, in their hinder parts; which is the worst kind of emerods, as all physicians acknowledge, both because their pains are far more sharp than those of the other kind, and because the malady is more out of the reach of remedies (for emerods, see verse 7 notes for hemorrhoids).

These tumors that the men of the city of Gath got when they moved the Ark there were just as terrible as they had been in the last city. This plague was definitely caused by the presence of the Ark in their city. They have committed a terrible sin by taking the Ark.

**1 Samuel 5:10 "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."**

“Ekron”: With judgment on Gath, the Philistines sent the Ark away to the next main city to see if God was behind their calamity. Located about 6 miles north of Gath, it was the closest major Philistine city to Israel’s border.

“The Ark ... to slay us”: The cry of the Ekronites was an admission that the Philistines had gotten the message that God was the source of their troubles. It is curious that the Philistines knew of God’s power to smite the Egyptians (4:8), yet they proudly believe themselves stronger than Egypt. The severity of the plagues grew increasingly worse (in verses 6-12), corresponding with the failure of the Philistines to humble themselves before God. Their actions were very similar to those of the Egyptians (Exodus Chapters 5-14).

This is the third of the five important cities of the Philistines. It was no different here. The people began to cry out for the Ark to be removed from their city. They are afraid of the Ark. They are aware that the power the Ark represented; was more powerful than they could handle.

**1 Samuel 5:11 "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."**

As the men of Ashdod had done before for the same reason (see 1 Samuel 5:8).

"And said, send away the Ark of the God of Israel": As these lords were united in their government, and made one common cause of it against Israel, one could not dispose of this capture without the consent of the rest; otherwise the lord of Ekron, with his princes, were clearly in it that it was right and best to send it away out of any of their principalities.

"And let it go again to its own place": To the land of Israel and Shiloh there, though to that it never returned more.

"That it slay us not, and our people": That is, all of them, for great numbers had been slain already, as follows.

"For there was a deadly destruction throughout all the city": A mortal disease went through the whole city, and swept away a multitude of people.

"The hand of God was very heavy there": It seems by the expression to have been heavier on the inhabitants of this city than upon those of Ashdod and Gath, which made them the more pressing to get rid of the Ark.

There was death and the plague in every city where the Ark went. Now, they have called all the princes together to get permission to send the Ark back to the Israelites. There were many dying from the plague and those who lived had the emerods.

**1 Samuel 5:12 "And the men that died not were smitten with the emerods: and the cry of the city went up to heaven."**

Smitten with either some plague or ulcer as may be thought from verse 6; or of the emerods; which infested and tormented even those whom it did not kill.

"The cry of the city": Or, of that city where the Ark was; and the city is put for the people inhabiting it.

"And the cry of the city went up to heaven": Not that it was heard and regarded there, but the phrase is used to denote the greatness of it, how exceeding loud and clamorous it was; partly on the account of the death of so many of the inhabitants, their relations and friends; and partly because of the intolerable pain they endured through the emerods.

This was a cry of despair. It was a cry for help. Their false god could not help them against God. The prince of Ekron does not want the Ark. He wants to send it home and stop the plague.

### 1 Samuel Chapter 5 Questions

1. Where did the Philistines first take the Ark?
2. Ashdod was one of the \_\_\_\_\_ most important cities of the Philistines.
3. Where did they put the Ark for keeping?
4. Dagon was the false god of \_\_\_\_\_.
5. What did it look like?
6. What did the fish part of the statue symbolize?
7. The Ark symbolized the presence of \_\_\_\_\_.
8. When those of Ashdod arose the next morning, what did they find?
9. Even this false god, Dagon, had to bow to \_\_\_\_\_.
10. After they set the statue of the false god back up, what did they find the second day?
11. Where were the palms of the hands found?
12. The false god had been \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ by the presence of the Spirit within the Ark.
13. What do the priests and the Philistines do even today, when they go to the temple of their false god?
14. What plague did God send on Ashdod?
15. What does "Emerods" mean?
16. How bad was the plague?

17. What conclusion did the people of Ashdod come to about the Ark?
18. Where did they send it next?
19. What happened there?
20. Where was the third place they sent the Ark?
21. What did the people there cry out?
22. Why did all the lords of the Philistines gather for a meeting?
23. What happened everywhere the Ark went?