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The Ark in the Land of the Philistines
First Samuel 5: 1-12



The action now shifts to **the Philistines** as **they** move **the Ark** through **their** territories – and suffer **Ha'Shem's** judgment as a result. **First Samuel 4** records **Isra'el's** defeat at the battle of **Ebenezer**, in which **Eli's sons**, **Hophni** and **Phinehas**, were slain and **the Ark** of the covenant fell into **the Philistines** hands. **The Israelites** feared that **their** beloved **Ark** had been lost forever or, even worse, that **ADONAI's** power might now pass to **their** enemies. But instead of **the LORD's** falling into **their** hands, those who possessed **God's holy vessel** discovered what the writer of **Hebrews** warns us: **It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God (Hebrews 10:31).**[133]

Chapter 5 contains the decisive inversion that is at the heart of the entire story. At the beginning of this chapter, **YHVH** and **the Ark** are captured and are therefore weak; **the Philistines** and **their god**, **Dagon**, are strong and have prevailed **(5:1)**. By the end of the chapter, **God's "hand"** (power) prevails **(5:11)** and **the Philistines** are reduced to a helpless cry **(5:12)**. As with **the song of Hannah (2:6-7)**, this is the story of the **God** who kills and brings life, who brings down and raises up, who makes poor and makes rich, who brings low and exalts. It is the story of the incomprehensible, but wonderful way in which **the God of Isra'el**, driven

into exile and captured **(4:21-22)**, cannot be kept helpless but will act according to **His** unequaled freedom and sovereign power.[134] In the end, neither **Isra'el** nor **the Philistines** could explain how it happened, but only that **the Philistines** couldn't wait to get rid of **the Ark**, and **the Israelites** were only too happy to receive **it**.