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The Ark at Gath
First Samuel 5: 8-9

The ark at Gath DIG: How did God get the attention of the Philistines? Why did the Philistines keep playing "hot potato" with the Ark and keep passing it around? Why didn't they send it back to Isra'el? Why is Ha'Shem so heavy handed?

REFLECT: How has God gotten your attention? How is the world today like the Philistines? How are you doing in this Philistine world? Why are believers defeated? What can we do about it? What does the apostle Paul have to say about this subject?

The episode of the Ark in Philistia speaks powerfully to God's people, and to the Philistine world.

The council of **the** five **Philistine** cities conferred and agreed to send **the Ark** to **Gath**. Though each city had its own **lord**, those leaders cooperated in times of crisis. **Gath** was twelve miles east-southeast of **Ashdod**, in the Elah Valley which opened a route into the Judean hills.[142] The most famous citizen of **Gath** was **Goliath** (see the commentary on **the Life of David, to see link click Al – David Kills Goliath**). **They asked themselves, "What are we to do with the Ark of the God of Isra'el?" ADONAI** had gotten **their** attention, just as **He** seeks ours today. **They** decided to **have the Ark of the God of Isra'el carried to Gath (5:8a),** thinking that perhaps there were simply local circumstances behind the apparent outbreak of divine wrath in **Ashdod**.



So they carried the Ark of the God of Isra'el to Gath (5:8b). But what **Ashdod** experienced, **Gad** experienced as well. **After it arrived there, the hand of ADONAI (5:6) oppressed that city, bringing terrible devastation upon them. The people** there recognized that **Isra'el's God** was the cause of **their** calamity. Whereas **Dagon's hands** were cut off (see **Bf – The Ark at Ashdod**), **ADONAI's hand** was heavy upon **Dagon's people**. It seems likely that **YHVH** afflicted **the Philistines** with bubonic plague, and many died**. He struck the people of the city, great and small alike; tumors broke out on them (5:9).** The word tumors speak generally of swelling and growths. This was a disease that frequented coastal regions, spread by mice and rats that came in on ships.

Why are believers defeated: The Israelites had been defeated at **Ebenezer** and **the Ark** taken captive (see **Bb – The Philistines Capture the Ark**). Therefore, **the Ark** narrative speaks powerfully to **God's people** and to **the Philistine** world. What was the message to **Isra'el** and to the Church? As Richard Phillips relates in his commentary on **First Samuel**, the point for us is to correctly understand the cause of our defeat in the world. The fall of **Dagon** before **the Ark of God** shows us that we don't suffer defeat because our enemy is so strong; rather, the cause of our weakness and defeat is our estranged relationship with **God**.

We frequently hear that the congregations of **God** are failing because today's society is too hostile to the Gospel. That we cannot expect educated people to seek truth from the Bible rather than from the "certified" results of science. That we

cannot hope for people who are drunk on sensual pleasures to be interested in **the Word of God** – especially a message that does not conform to popular tastes and demands. That we cannot expect people to give their internet-short attention spans to serious Bible preaching. **The Philistines** of secularism, sensualism, and relativism are just too strong, and biblical teaching lacks sufficient appeal. It is on this view that so many believers and congregations of **God** have concluded that we must join **the Philistines** if we are to win them at all. So it seemed to Isra'el. **The Philistines** had better technology and organization, and even bigger and stronger men. Yet how easy it was for **ADONAI** to cast **Dagon** flat **down** on **his face**!

This shows us, by the way, that it's not our job to cast down **the Philistine** gods. Our job is to honor **the Lord** in all things, refusing to join in the world's idolatry **(First John 2:15-17)** and remaining faithful. As a result, believers are told to **stand firm against all strategies of the devil (Eph 6:11).** This is not to say that believers should not speak out against **the devils** lies. It simply means that the Church and her mission is not called to wage worldly warfare against our enemies. In **His** own time, in **His** own ways, we can be sure that **God** will humble the idols of the world. We are to remember **the Lord**, trusting in **Him** and spreading **His** Gospel.

Isra'el's problem in the days of **'Eli's priesthood** was that **the people** forgot about **ADONAI** (see **At – 'Eli's Ineffective Rebuke of His Sons**). **'Eli's sons** could not possibly have committed **their sins** in the Tabernacle had **they** remembered **YHVH**. **The Israelites** were spiritually estranged from **God** and **His Word**; **their** relationship was a charade; and **their** lives were an affront to **Ha'Shem's** purity. Forgetting **the LORD**, and drifting from **Him** (see the commentary on **Hebrews Al – How Shall We Escape if We Ignore so Great a Salvation**), made **Isra'el** easy prey for **the Philistine** army. And so it is with the Church today.

The same is true on a personal level. Consider, as one example, the struggle of men (and, increasingly, women as well) with the **sin** of pornography. Numerous surveys show a majority of men are practically addicted to it, mainly by means of internet websites. Surveys also show that men, believing men, and even Messianic rabbis and pastors, are addicted to pornography at rates similar to unbelievers. In response to cries of alarm, we are told that we must simply face the fact that the temptation is too strong, the pictures too accessible, and men's hearts too deeply ingrained for us to expect any real change. What can an **Israelite** man do in the face of so mighty a **Philistine** giant?

The answer is that we can remember **ADONAI**. We can turn to **God** for **His** power. We can bathe our hearts and minds in the glory of **God** through **His Word**. We can gain a passion for the cause of the Gospel in a dying world, so that we no longer need fantasies in order to feel important. We can pray and ask our mighty, merciful **God** to cleanse us for our **sins** and make us holy. The reality is that a believing man who is walking close to **the Lord**, whose active faith is employed by **the Ruach Ha'Kodesh** (see the commentary on **Romans Ci – The Leading of the Ruach**) through **God's Word** and prayer, and who is participating in a supportive community with other believers is not easily overcome by seductive videos of naked women.

The truth is that believers *must not* continue in **the sinful** habits of **the Philistine** world; but also, we *need not* continue in the power of **sin**. Yes, **the Philistine** is stronger than we are, but not stronger than **ADONAI**! **Paul** reminds us: **He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world (1 John 4:4).** This was **Paul's** logic when **he** wrote to believers living in a world just as deprived as ours, with **sinful** pleasures just as accessible and culturally tolerated: **You also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Messiah Yeshua. Therefore, don't let sin reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions . . . For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under legalism but under grace (Romans 6:11-14).** While total freedom from our **sin** nature must wait until we reach heaven, believers may live increasingly free from **the dominion of sin** because **God** is greater and more powerful than **sin**.[143]

*Dear Heavenly **Father**, praise **You** that **You** are not a **God** of only one city or of only one country. **You** are almighty and **Sovereign** over the whole world! No one can run away from **Your** all-seeing eye **(Jonah 1:10-17)**. **You** see everywhere and **You** know all about everyone! **You observe my journeying and my resting and You are familiar with all my ways. Even before a word is on my tongue, behold, ADONAI, You know all about it (Psalm 139:3-4).** It is so wonderful that **You** are always with me. **Where can I go from Your Ruach? Where can I flee from Your presence? If I go up to heaven, You are there, and if I make my bed in She'ol, look, You are there too. If I take the wings of the dawn and settle on the other side of the sea, even there Your hand will lead me, and Your right hand will lay hold of me. If I say: "Surely darkness covers me, night keeps light at a distance from me," even darkness is not dark for You, and night is as bright as day – darkness and light are alike. (Psalms 139:7-11).** Thank you for providing **Messiah Yeshua** to be the sin*

offering ***for all who love and follow him as their Lord and Savior (John 1:29 and Second Corinthians 5:21).*** *In* ***Messiah Yeshua's*** *holy* ***Name*** *and Power of* ***His*** *Resurrection. Amen*