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The Ark at ‘Ekron
First Samuel 5: 10-12

The ark at ‘Ekron DIG: Why did the Philistines keep playing “hot potato” with the Ark and keep passing it around? What took them so long to send it back to Isra’el? Why is God so heavy handed? Who is at fault for the suffering and deaths of the Philistines? The Philistines? The Israelites? ADONAI?

REFLECT: What scheme did the Philistine wise men use to test ADONAI? What was the outcome of their test? What do the events regarding the Ark teach us about what it means to call God holy? How does YHVH display His holiness today? Is the LORD sending you something that you want to get rid of?

The Philistines finally decide enough was enough, and sent the dreaded object of their destruction back to the Israelites.

Next they sent the Ark of God to ‘Ekron, six miles north of **Gath**, the closest major **Philistine** city to **Isra’el’s** border. **But when the Ark of God arrived in ‘Ekron the people shouted, “Now they’ve brought the Ark of the God of Isra’el to us, to kill us and our people” (5:10)!** The news of **the deaths** at **Gath** had not escaped **their** ears **(5:6)**. The cry of **the people** there was an admission that **ADONAI** was the source of **their** troubles. It was curious that **the Philistines** knew of **Ha’Shem’s** power to strike the **Egyptians (4:8)**, yet **they** believed **themselves** stronger than **Egypt**. The severity of the plagues grew increasingly worse, similar to those of **the Egyptians**, which corresponds to **the Philistines’** failure to humble **themselves** before **YHVH**.[144]

So for a second time **(5:8a), they summoned all the lords of the Philistines and** said: **Send the Ark of the God of Isra’el away!** There was no appeal to **Dagon**. **The Philistine god** was clearly helpless and irrelevant in the face of **YHVH**, **the God** of **the Exodus**. At that time **the Ark** symbolized **ADONAI’s** power, even recognized by **the Philistines**. The strategy of **the Philistines** in

moving **the Ark** from city to city is not unlike the desperate negotiations to see where to dump nuclear waste. It is exceedingly dangerous. Everyone agrees about that, and everyone believers it should be dumped somewhere far away. **The Philistines** agreed that **YHVH** was exceedingly dangerous, and **the Ark** should be placed somewhere far away.[145]



They drew the only possible conclusion: **Let it go back to its own place, so that it won’t kill us and our people! – because death and panic pervaded the whole city; God’s hand was very heavy there. The Philistines**, who seemed for an instant to prevail (**to see link click Bb – The Philistines Captured the Ark**), were defeated. **The people who didn’t die (5:6) were struck with the tumors; and the city’s cries for help went up to heaven (5:11-12).** The **cries** of **the city** of **Shiloh (4:13)** echoed **the cries** heard in **Egypt**. **And there** was **a great cry throughout all the land of Egypt, such as there has never been, nor will ever be again (Exodus 11:6).** It may well be that **the cries** in **Egypt** were so loud that there would never be **cries** like that **again**, but **the Philistines** came in a close second. **They** were also defeated, humiliated, and placed in jeopardy by the power of **ADONAI**, who was once again free and on the move symbolically in **the Ark**. The early Church confessed that the power of **death** could not hold **Yeshua (Acts 2:24)**. Already here in **First Samuel**, **the Spirit of God** tells us that the power of **Dagon** and **the Philistines** was no match for **the God** of

Isra’el. **ADONAI** was on the loose: free, sovereign and about to do something new,[146] as we shall see in the next chapter.

God’s message for the Philistine world. By casting down **Dagon** (see **Bf – The Ark at Ashdod**) and striking **the Philistines** with **His** wrath, **YHVH** delivered a message not only to **His** own **people** but also to **the Philistine** world. As Richard Phillips relates in his commentary on **First Samuel**, **first, God proved that he is a living God. The Philistines** thought of **their gods** as objects – idols that **they** worshiped to gain an edge in the problems of life, but still objects. **Isra’el** had fallen into this kind of thinking when it put its confidence in **the Ark**, while forgetting **God Himself**. But **ADONAI** is not a thing to be manipulated and controlled, an object to be put on the shelf and taken down at our whim. **He** is still today what he was in Bible times: **But the LORD is the true God; He is the living God, the eternal King (Jeremiah 10:10).** When you think you have **Him** defeated, then **He** is active; when you think you have **Him** captive, **He** knocks down your god. **He** is **God** who cannot be restrained, unlimited, absolute, eternal – the living **God**. For this reason, we must always be thinking about **God**, before whom we **live and move and have our being (Acts 17:28,** quoting **Job 12:10)**.

Second, the LORD taught that He is the only true God. God is jealous of **His** exclusive status: **I am ADONAI your God . . . You shall have no other gods before Me** (**Exodus 20:2-3). YHVH** is not satisfied if we make a little room for **Him** on the shelf beside our other **gods**. **He** demands exclusive sovereignty in our lives. **He** will not share **His** reign with idols, but ruthlessly humiliates **them** and strikes those who serve **them**. On the national level, if we make a god of government, then **God** will send corrupt and incompetent leaders. If we make a god of the economy, **God** is able to make the stock market plunge. If we use science to violate **His** commandments, then **God** will make our technology a curse to our lives. **God** demands that all things be submitted to **His** sovereign rule. **I am God, and there is no other, He** declares: **I am God, there is none like Me (Isaiah 46:9).** Likewise, on the personal level, **God** calls for us to submit all things to **His** service. **He** is not willing to share **His** sovereignty in our hearts with false **gods** such as fame, pleasure, or wealth.

Third, the living and true God proved that He is powerful and mighty. How swiftly and surely **the Philistines** were crushed when **the heavy hand** of **God** struck **them**, just as **YHVH** struck **Pharaoh** and **the Egyptians** in the time of **Moses**. There is no chance of withstanding the judgment of **Ha’Shem**, either now or in the future. The chances of sexual liberty producing happiness are nonexistent.

For that reason, the odds of **everything in the world (First John 2:15-16)** prevailing indefinitely are exactly zero. **ADONAI** will strike down every rebel power with **His** infinite might.

History has born this reality over and over again. The French Revolution raised its fist against **God**, but didn’t produce brotherliness, but tyranny. Nineteenth-century German humanism did not produce a secular heaven, but the hell of Nazism. Atheistic communism did not produce a workers’ paradise but a slaves’ poorhouse. Likewise, secular-humanistic, postmodern America will not achieve its promised dreams of pleasure and prosperity, but only a legacy of societal ruin and lost opportunity. **God** lives. **God** demands our worship. And **God** is all-powerful to frustrate the plans of rebel mankind.

Finally, God reveals himself as a saving God. The Philistines might well have reflected on what **ADONAI** was doing to the enemies of **His people**. How faithful this **God** was to allow **Himself**, via **the Ark**, to fall into the hands of **His** enemies, that **He** might better save **Isra’el**. Reflecting on **God’s** covenant-keeping grace, **the Philistines** should have rejected **Dagon** and every other false **god** in order to embrace the true **God** in faith.

The message **God** delivered to **the Philistines** is the message we need to give to our world today. We must insist that **God** is not on the shelf, that **He** is very much involved in events and affairs, in accordance with the principles taught in **His Word**. **He** is a living **God**, and we must believe in **Him**. Moreover, we must insist that **He** is a jealous **God**, warning of grave danger for all who trust in other **gods**. We must show people from both Scripture and **God’s** providential dealings in history how foolish and futile it is to rebel against the true and living **God**, and how severe **His** holy judgment is against **His** enemies.

But we should also tell the world that the **God** we should all fear is also the merciful and saving **God** whom we can trust and adore. The incident of **the Ark falling** into enemy hands was only a preview of a greater work of salvation. **God** sent **His** own **Son** into this world to deliver **His people**. **Yeshua** surrendered to **His** enemies, but did not strike them with **His heavy hand**. Instead, **He** gave **Himself** to **death** on the cross. In this way, **God** struck the **heaviest** blow to the power and domination of **sin**, taking away its curse by cleansing our guilt with the precious blood of **Messiah**. The plague of **sin** that rightly should kill us, fell instead on **Yeshua**. Indeed, it was for **Philistine sinners** like us **the Master** died. **While we were still sinners, Messiah died for us (Romans 5:8).** Now, by trusting in **Messiah**,

we are reconciled to live in the light of **God’s** love. And, remembering **the Lord** in obedient faith, we need never fear any **Philistine** ever again.[147]

*Dear Heavenly **Father**, praise **You** that though **You** are almighty and all-powerful, **You** are also kind and gracious by revealing **Your** power to people. **You** showed **Your** power to all the **Philistine citizens** by displaying **Your** power when **You** knocked down **their god** in front of **Your** holy Ark **(First Samuel 5:4),** and when **You** afflicted **them** with tumors. **You** have power greater than any other of this world’s so-called gods. **You** are **the One** and only **True** and living **God (Jeremiah 10:10, Isaiah 40:25-31).** Please give my family and friends a moment of “spiritual clarity” so that they can see their sin for what it is, so that they might see the need for you in their lives. **Cast your burden on ADONAI, and He will sustain you (Psalm 55:22a).** Praise **You** for being such a loving and all-powerful Heavenly **Father**! **But whoever did receive Him, those trusting in His name, to these He gave the right to become children of God (John 1:12)!** May they be filled with **Your** eternal joy and peace as they keep their eyes on You. In **Messiah Yeshua’s** holy **Name** and power of **His** resurrection. Amen*