

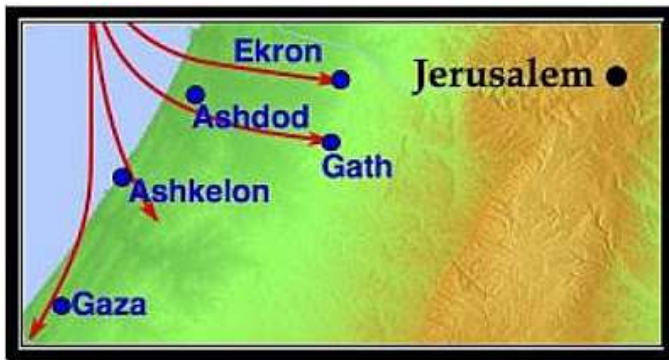
The Ark and the Philistines – 1 Samuel 5:1-12

Introduction:

The Philistines and the Hebrews faced each other in battle. The Hebrews initially were defeated so they brought their most sacred item out to the battle field, the Ark of the Covenant. The Hebrew army cheered at its arrival and the Philistines were frightened. Yet when the day was done, it was the Philistines who were triumphant, and they carried away the spoils of war, which included the Ark of the Covenant. The Hebrews and the Philistines both had a mistaken opinion that the Ark was a religious token, and whoever possessed it possessed power. In this chapter the Philistines were to learn an importance lesson: religious relics do not hold power. The power comes from the God the relic points to. What happens when the God of Israel does battle with the god of the Philistines? This is what our study focuses on today.

Yahweh vs Dagon – 1 Samuel 5:1-5

1. In verse 1 we read that the Philistines are now in possession of the Hebrews' Ark of God. How do you think they feel about this? What town is the Ark taken to?



2. In Ashdod, where is the Ark taken? Who is Dagon? Why do you think they put the Ark of God there?

3. The next morning the people of Ashdod went to the temple to pray, and what did they find (v. 3)? What might be the significance of this? What do the people do for their idol? (cf. Psalm 115:3-9)
4. The next day when the people come into the temple of Dagon, what do they find? (v. 4). What is the significance of this find?



5. Verse 5 gives us a peculiar practice of the Philistines. What is it and what is supposed to signify? Could Zechariah 1:9 be in reference to this practice? How might that help us understand the Zechariah passage?
6. Conquering nations often attributed their success to their gods (cf. Isaiah 36:18-20). What did the Philistines think when they first conquered Israel and took the Ark of God? What might they be thinking now?

Yahweh in Philistia – 1 Samuel 5:6-12

7. The armies of God failed on the battle field, but God is not finished with the Philistines. What happens to the people of Ashdod (v. 6)?
8. What do the people conclude is happening (v. 7)? Who is the God of Israel opposing?
9. The people of Ashdod gather their elders and seek an answer to the Ark problem. What is their solution? (v. 8) Does this kind of solution sound familiar?

10. What happens to the next city when the Ark of God is taken there (v. 9)? Do you think it is significant that it is only the men who are afflicted?
11. Verse 10 gives Gath's answer to the Ark problem. What was it? How did the people of Ekron respond to this solution?
12. In verse 11 they have a general council of all the leaders and what do they conclude to do with the Ark?
13. Verse 12 reveals further plagues on the Philistines. What two things are the men facing because the Ark of God is in their territory? What is the response of the people?

Conclusion

It is clear in chapter 5 that the main character is God of Israel. The Philistines thought they had conquered the Israelite God when they captured the Ark of God and destroyed the Israelite army. But in every city, in every situation the people were left fearing the God of Israel. He did not need an army to fight His battles. He would cause all false gods to fall down before Him. If people did not fear the Lord (reverence Him) for who he is, then He would bring fear to them by what He can do.

First we have two priests and their father learn about the fear of the Lord. Now a foreign nation learns about the fear of the Lord. Yet look at the response of the Philistines. They desire to get rid of the Ark of God. They could have knelt and submitted to the God of Israel, but instead they choose to get rid of the Ark of God (see next chapter).

This will not be the last time people are given the opportunity to bow before the living God, after He has displayed His power to them. But they will also choose to send God away instead of submitting to Him. Read Matthew 8:28-34. Why did people choose this kind of fear instead of reverent fear? Could it be people believe the lie Satan told in the Garden, that God cannot be trusted? ("You will not surely die")

How are we doing today? Do people fear God and run, or do they fear God and worship?