

Worthy!  
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## 1 Samuel 5 and 6

In some ways you might say the “central character” of this lesson is not a person, but a symbol: the Ark of the Covenant. **What do you know about it?**

**What did the Ark of the Covenant represent (1 Sam. 4:4)?** In the Baptist faith we don't have as many symbols or “religious” objects as other faiths. Still, we're taught to have respect for a copy of the Bible; a church building; etc. The Lord's Supper is probably the closest we come to symbolism. **What's different about what Baptists believe about the Lord's Supper than what Catholics believe?** (see footnote below <sup>1</sup> ) **When it comes to “religious” symbols and objects, how do we honor their sacred significance without becoming superstitious?**

The Ark of the Covenant represented the presence of God among the people. As we'll see, both the Israelites and their enemies the Philistines mistakenly thought they could contain and control God's power by having possession of the Ark. It was a very bad plan.

Here's the big idea: Only God is worthy of our worship. When the Ark was removed from its proper place bad things happened. When we try to live our lives without Jesus in His proper place as Lord, bad things will happen. On the other hand, when we acknowledge Jesus' rightful position in our lives, we can say along with the Prophet Samuel, “the Lord has helped us. (1 Sam. 7:12)”

Here's some background on what has happened in 1 Samuel chapter four:

- Verse one of chapter four tells us Samuel began as the leading prophet in Israel; and Israel went out to battle against the Philistines.
- The Philistines were winning --- four thousand Israelites lay dead.
- So Eli the priest's evil sons got a not so bright idea: *“Let's take the ark of the covenant of the Lord out of it's place in the tent of*

*meeting and down to the battle and we'll be victorious over the Philistines."*

- Not only did these two characters not honor God, now they thought they could control His power and "use" God for their success in war. Bad plan!
- The Israelites in the camp were so excited to see the ark they shouted loud enough to shake the ground.
- This told the Philistines something was up. They said, "*A god (little g) has come into the camp and this is bad for us.*"
- So the two armies fought again. This time thirty thousand plus Israelites were killed including Eli's two stupid sons. And the Philistines captured the Ark of the Covenant as a battle trophy.
- The Philistines were idol-worshiping people that worshiped many false gods. They thought, "*Hey this god worked pretty well for us. Let's add another to our collection!*" In other words, they TOO thought they could control and "use" the power of God; again, a bad plan.
- Remember: When we try to move God from His proper place; bad things will happen.

Now, let's look at the text. We pick up the story in chapter five; verse one.

1 Samuel 5:1–6 (NLT)

After the Philistines captured the Ark of God, they took it from the battleground at Ebenezer to the town of Ashdod. <sup>2</sup> They carried the Ark of God into the temple of Dagon and placed it beside an idol of Dagon. <sup>3</sup> But when the citizens of Ashdod went to see it the next morning, Dagon had fallen with his face to the ground in front of the Ark of the Lord! So they took Dagon and put him in his place again. <sup>4</sup> But the next morning the same thing happened—Dagon had fallen face down before the Ark of the Lord again. This time his head and hands had broken off and were lying in the doorway. Only the trunk of his body was left intact. <sup>5</sup> That is why to this day neither the priests of Dagon nor anyone who enters the temple of Dagon in Ashdod will step on its threshold.

- The Philistines added the Ark of God to their "collection" of idols.
- The very presence of the Ark destroyed their false god, Dagon.

- Verse five really shows their superstition. Since the pieces of old Dagon were scattered on the threshold of the door of their temple, from then on they “jumped” over the threshold every time they went in or out.
- It wasn’t just their false idol that was destroyed. Verse six says: <sup>6</sup> Then the Lord’s heavy hand struck the people of Ashdod and the nearby villages with a plague of tumors.
- We don’t really know what this illness was. Because of the reference to rats in the next chapter, some believe it was bubonic plague. Whatever it was it was devastating to the people of Ashdod, and many died.
- **Question: If the Philistines had understood God’s holiness and wanted Him to remove this illness, what SHOULD they have done? What do you think they did instead?**
- We have an expression we use when our government doesn’t want to do the hard work of solving a painful problem. We say they “kick the can down the road.” The Philistines began to “kick the ark down the road.”
- The people in Ashdod said, “Send that thing over to Gath!”
- **What happened to the people in Gath?**
- So they sent it to Ekron. The people in Ekron had heard about what happened in Ashdod and Gath and they said, “This thing will kill us all! Get it out of here!”
- This went on for seven months. So the superstitious Philistines called for the magicians to ask, “*What can we do about this?*”
- The magicians said, “*You need to send this thing back to the Israelites but you need to make nice with their God, so let’s do a little craft project.*”
- They wanted to make a “guilt offering” to God. But not the kind of guilt offering God had instructed the Israelites to make when they sinned.
- They made some tiny sculptures of rats and tumors out of gold and they put them in the Ark and put the ark in a cart.
- But none of the Philistines wanted to drive it back to Israel. So they came up with a plan to transport the ark, and at the same time to test and see if this plague was really from God or just a coincidence.
- They took two milk cows that had just had calves and tied them to a cart with the Ark in it. The cows would instinctively stay where their nursing calves were, so if the cows started moving

toward Israel they knew it would have been the power of God at work.

1 Samuel 6:11–16 (NLT)

<sup>11</sup> Then the Ark of the Lord and the chest containing the gold rats and gold tumors were placed on the cart. <sup>12</sup> And sure enough, without veering off in other directions, the cows went straight along the road toward Beth-shemesh, lowing as they went. The Philistine rulers followed them as far as the border of Beth-shemesh.

<sup>13</sup> The people of Beth-shemesh were harvesting wheat in the valley, and when they saw the Ark, they were overjoyed! <sup>14</sup> The cart came into the field of a man named Joshua and stopped beside a large rock. So the people broke up the wood of the cart for a fire and killed the cows and sacrificed them to the Lord as a burnt offering.

<sup>15</sup> Several men of the tribe of Levi lifted the Ark of the Lord and the chest containing the gold rats and gold tumors from the cart and placed them on the large rock. Many sacrifices and burnt offerings were offered to the Lord that day by the people of Beth-shemesh.

<sup>16</sup> The five Philistine rulers watched all this and then returned to Ekron that same day.

- Okay, interesting story, but what does it have to do with you and me?
- **In your opinion, what's the "moral" of this story?**
- When the Ark was removed from its proper place bad things happened.
- So, if don't mess with the Ark of God, right? **How does this apply to us?**
- When we try to live our lives without Jesus in His proper place as Lord; bad things will happen.
- Eli's sons and their enemies the Philistines all misunderstood who God is and who *they* were. They thought they could manipulate His power for their plans. **How does this same thing go on with people today?**
- Have you noticed that many people consider the word "religion" synonymous with God? *"It's not bad to have a little religion in your life."* That kind of statement puts the God of the universe in the same category as: insurance; fire extinguishers; and spare tires!

- God takes care of His children, but He is the ruler of all creation not an on-call repairman to fix the problems in our lives.
- A follower of Christ should never say: "God is an important part of my life." God is not an "ingredient" in our lives, He the SOURCE that makes my life possible. His son Jesus is the SACRIFICE that makes it eternal.
- Remember the false idol Dagon? When they placed the Ark of God in the room with the idol it wound up in pieces on the floor? **What does that say about our God? What is the favorite bumper sticker of those who deny there is only one true God?**
- Jehovah God doesn't "coexist" with any idol. Isaiah 42:8 (NLT)  
<sup>8</sup> "I am the Lord; that is my name! I will not give my glory to anyone else, nor share my praise with carved idols.
- God won't share His glory with our modern idols either. Sadly even a lot of followers of Christ don't get this right. They put God on the shelf of their lives with an equal position to the other "good" things like family; friends; the flag; apple pie. If you try to put him on a "shelf" with the "other gods" in your life, bad things will happen.
- There is a "happy ending" to this story. Eventually, because of Samuel's leadership, the Israelites turned to God and He miraculously defeated the Philistines on their behalf (1 Sam. 7:3-12.)
- As memorial to God's deliverance, we're told:

1 Samuel 7:12 (NLT)

12 Samuel then took a large stone and placed it between the towns of Mizpah and Jeshanah.\* He named it Ebenezer (which means "the stone of help"), for he said, "Up to this point the LORD has helped us!"

So, What's the Takeaway?

- The God of the universe will not "coexist" with anything in our lives, even the good things like family; work; and even ministry. If those things become equal to God himself, they're as much an idol as old Dagon.
- We need to ask: Is Jesus on the throne where the King of the universe belongs, or is He on the shelf with the other "good" things in our lives?

- More practically: Does my relationship with Christ run through every part of every day, or is it just what I do on Sunday from eight to noon?
- If we get God out of his proper position in our lives, bad things will happen. If we acknowledge His place on the throne of our lives, we will be blessed.

the Roman Catholic church affirmed (as it still affirms) transubstantiation... Transubstantiation means that the substance of the bread and wine are miraculously transformed into the substance of Christ's body and blood so that they are no longer bread and wine, though they appear to be. the Reformers insisted that at the table we give thanks to Christ for his finished and accepted work of atonement, rather than repeat, renew, reoffer, re-present, or reactivate it, as the Roman Catholic doctrine of the mass affirms.<sup>1</sup> - Packer, J. I. (1993). Concise theology: a guide to historic Christian beliefs. Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House.)?